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Ciril Joseph Kuttiyanikkal

Khrist Bhakta Movement:
A Model for an Indian Church?

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Khrist Bhakta Movement:
A Model for an Indian Church?
Inculturation in the Area of Community Building

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Khrist Bhakta Movement:
A Model for an Indian Church?

Inculturation in the Area of Community Building

by

Ciril Joseph Kuttiyanikkal

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Without doubt, there will be errors, omissions and over-simplifications for which I take absolute responsibility while hoping that the rest of the material will be enough to stimulate insights and new trains of thought into a new model of being church in India. I can reassure the reader that this is not just the out-come of an academic work alone, but it is the result of the everyday challenge I face in my situation. Hence I have put a bit of “heart and soul” into it. Therefore, I hope that you will enjoy this work very much and find it stimulating as well.

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System of Transliteration

The system of transliteration from Hindi to English characters used in this book is from the *oxford Hindi-English dictionary*.

<i>ahimsa</i>	non-injury/non-violence
<i>aṅgavastrā</i>	a single tunic-type chasuble with a stole
<i>aguā</i>	guide/leader
<i>añjali hastā</i>	a profound bow of the head with joined hand on the forehead
<i>ārtī</i>	the waving of light or incense
<i>āśram</i>	abode of a hermit
<i>avātār</i>	incarnation
<i>bhajan</i>	devotional song
<i>bhaktimārgī</i>	one who accepts devotion as means for spiritual realization
<i>brahmaṇ</i>	person belonging first <i>varṇ</i>
<i>(aham) brahmāsmi</i>	I am that Brahman/God
<i>camār</i>	a person belonging to the leather worker class considered as a base person
<i>celā</i>	disciple
<i>dalāls</i>	agents
<i>dalit</i>	oppressed
<i>darbār</i>	a royal court
<i>darśan</i>	seeing/sight
<i>dharm/dharma</i>	the complex of religious and social obligation a Hindu required to fulfil.
<i>dīvālī (dīpāvali)</i>	the festival of light
<i>dīkṣā</i>	consecration or initiation
<i>dīyā</i>	a lamp or vessel holding oil for light
<i>garbhā rah</i>	an inner room/shrine
<i>ghāṭs</i>	steps leading to the water
<i>guru</i>	teacher
<i>hindutvā</i>	Hindu identity
<i>holī</i>	festival of colours
<i>iṣṭdevātā</i>	cherished deity
<i>jāt</i>	caste
<i>jīv/īvātman</i>	the individual soul
<i>jñān</i>	knowledge
<i>jñānamārgī</i>	the one who adheres to knowledge as spiritual means
<i>jyotirling</i>	phallus of light
<i>karm</i>	action
<i>kṣatriyā</i>	a person belonging to the second <i>varṇ</i>

<i>mandir</i>	temple
<i>mannat</i>	vow or promise
<i>maṇḍlī</i>	a small circle/gathering
<i>mokṣ</i>	release from rebirth in the world
<i>mārg</i>	way
<i>muṣahar</i>	one of the lowest sections in the Indian society
<i>mūrti</i>	image (of deity)
<i>nīm caṭnī</i>	bitter liquid (of melia azadirachta)
<i>nirguṇ</i>	without qualities or attributes
<i>niṣkāmkarm</i>	(work with) the renunciation of the fruit of the action
<i>ojhā</i>	a sorcerer
<i>pañcāṅgpm</i>	homage of 5 organs of the body
<i>paṇḍit</i>	a priest or scholar
<i>piṇḍās</i>	balls of wheat or rice
<i>pradakṣiṇā</i>	circumambulation to the right
<i>prakṛti</i>	nature/ a force or principle evolving the material world
<i>pūjā</i>	sacrifice
<i>rakṣābandan</i>	the festival when sisters tie a talisman on the arm of their brothers
<i>rāmlīla</i>	deeds of Rama/ a dramatic presentation of the deeds of Rama
<i>ṛṣi</i>	mendicant
<i>saccidānand</i>	(comprises three words <i>sat</i> , <i>chit</i> and <i>ānand</i>) eternal or absolute bliss consciousness
<i>sādhnā</i>	devoted striving/ spiritual means
<i>sādhū</i>	virtuous, holy person
<i>saguṇ</i>	having qualities and attributes
<i>samāj</i>	society
<i>saṁnyāsī</i>	an ascetic
<i>saṁnyās</i>	renunciation of the world
<i>saṁsārā</i>	cycle of births and states, transmigration
<i>sandhyā</i>	intermission/juncture, evening
<i>satguru</i>	guru par excellence
<i>satsaṅg</i>	good association/company prayer meetings
<i>sēva</i>	service
<i>śūdrā</i>	a member of the fourth and lowest <i>varṇ</i>
<i>svadeśī</i>	of or belonging to one's own country
<i>svāmī</i>	lord
<i>varṇ</i>	colour
<i>vaiśā</i>	a person belonging to third <i>varṇ</i>
<i>yajña</i>	sacrifice

yoga (from *yog*)

yogī

yug

concentration, union

one who practices *yoga*

an age/era

Chapter 1

Introduction

Christianity was born in the western part of Asia and reached India even before it reached most parts of Europe. It has been present in India for the last twenty centuries. However, Christians in India are identified as foreigners or Europeans in their own homeland. After the Second Vatican Council, inculturation became the catchword in the Indian Church circles. Many prominent individuals and the Indian Church as a whole, under the guidance of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, took various measures for the inculturation of the Church. There was an increased earnestness and vigour in efforts for the formation of an "Indian" Church. Among these efforts was the establishment of many Indian *āśrams*. Soon, however, the enthusiasm for the Indian Church waned and gave way to lethargy. At the heart of it all there was a feeling that nothing had been achieved and nothing more could be achieved. All that remained were the endeavours of the elites; the common man deserted the Catholic *āśrams*, only a few westerners took any interest in them, and, all the while, the desire for an Indian Church remained unfulfilled. Christianity continues to be viewed as the religion of foreigners, and Christians and Christian institutions continue to be looked upon as agents and institutions of Europeans. However, in the midst of this very situation a movement consisting of 50,000 to 60,000 people called *Khrist Bhakta*¹ (Christ-devotee) is spreading in and around Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, the cultural and religious capital of India. It seems attractive to the ordinary people and gives the impression that it has succeeded in blending the Hindu culture and Christian faith. The apparent success of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement gives an impression that it fulfils the desire for a new way of "being church" in India.

1.1. Question Prompting this Research

How can the *Khrist Bhakta* movement contribute to the inculturation of the Catholic Church in India in the area of building a community of faith, and to what extent can it become a model for an Indian Church? In order to answer this question, first we need to delineate what the *Khrist Bhakta* movement exactly is, what sort of origin it had, and how it is organized and functions. Furthermore, we need to find out what kind of Christianity the *Khrist Bhaktas* manage to practice while living as Hindus within a Hindu cultural background. What are the *Khrist Bhakta* movement's ecclesiological visions and what are the theological difficulties en-

¹ In the strict sense, the word in Hindi as *Oxford Dictionary* translates has to be *khrīṣṭ bhakt*. However, due to the popular usage we shall be using the term as *Khrist Bhakta* in our discussions.

countered by the movement in becoming a model for an Indian Church? The originality of the contribution of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement to building an inculturated Church in India becomes more evident when these questions are posed against an overview of the general efforts made in that area.

1.2. Aims of this Research

We aim to investigate and evaluate the *Khrist Bhakta* movement as a model for inculturation of the Church in India in the area of community building. We intend to highlight the difference between this model and the earlier models of inculturation tried out in India. It is also our intention to find out whether this movement can really be conceived of as a model of *ecclesia* for India. We will need to investigate the basic ecclesiology of the movement and instigate a scholarly discussion on the main sacramentological issues at stake, specifically concerning the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. We intend to deal with these concerns in detail from a social, a theological – in particular a pastoral-theological – and sacramental perspective.

1.3. Methodological Considerations

We have used multiple research approaches and theoretical constructs. The leading approach and methodological frameworks vary depending on the nature of each chapter. This first chapter is introductory in nature, placing the question behind this research in perspective. It describes the research problem, aims of research, and a survey of earlier studies on the same subject matter to show that the present research is different from any done earlier. This chapter also gives a systematic presentation of the criteria developed to judge if the model we present can be considered as a successful model for an Indian Church.

The second chapter is a survey of historical and descriptive written materials covering the present state of the Indian Church, the various efforts at inculturation initiated by the Church, and a critical evaluation of those efforts, prompting a different approach to inculturation.

The third chapter has used a combination of methods, namely, participant observation, semi-structured qualitative interviews with key figures, coupled with documentary research into the *Khrist Bhakta* movement in order to collate the data. The details of the methodology used, the problems we faced, and how we tried to minimize the drawbacks need elaborate description, which will be provided at the beginning of the chapter.

The fourth chapter also uses various *modi operandi*. The first section is a systematic description of the Christianity practiced by the *Khrist Bhaktas*, followed by a broadened evaluation and analysis of the movement in terms of its strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats to identify its internal and external factors that will affect the future of the movement. The following section is an interpretative section investigating the frameworks behind the religious

practices of the devotees. This has been achieved by adopting some of the methods and approaches used by Robert Schreiter and Clifford Geertz in cultural studies. Schreiter states that every culture has *ideational* elements (worldview, values, rules and behaviour), *performantial* elements (rituals and roles) and *material elements* (language, symbols, food, clothing, housing and other artifacts)². Geertz speaks about the importance of diagnosing the “cultural texts”. With the help of some of their methodologies, we will establish the frameworks behind the *Khrist Bhaktas*’ religious practices, rituals, and religious objects. Finally, this chapter provides an evaluation section based on the criteria we have developed with the help of experts in the field of theological inculturation.

The fifth chapter makes a theological investigation into the ecclesiology and sacramental theology of the movement. The movement lacks an explicit ecclesiology. Its ecclesiology is implicit and pragmatic. It needs to be identified on a meta-level on the basis of various features of the movement. In order to bring out the implicit ecclesiology, we have made an explorative and explicative study. The movement is centred on the *āśram*, which comes from Hinduism, while the majority of the practices are a charismatic form of Catholic Christianity. Therefore, we have classified the ecclesiological model as “*āśram*-based charismatic”. We were confronted with the question of whether the devotees who are not baptised, or even not urged to receive baptism, could be accepted into the Eucharistic communion on the basis of their faith. This question led us to research into the reasons concerning the negative attitude towards baptism prevalent in India in the historical relationship between culture and baptism, while paying special attention to the early Church and the current doctrine on becoming a member of the Church. *Khrist Bhaktas* appear to be in a category of their own. Starting from a reflection on the role of the Eucharist and Eucharist-related issues of the movement, we have discussed the social, pastoral, and theological implications of the hypothesis that non-baptised devotees might be accepted into the Eucharistic sharing and its implications for our understanding of the Eucharist, the *Khrist Bhaktas*, and the Church in India and throughout the world. Our considerations end in a final reflection on our main question: Is the *Khrist Bhakta* movement a successful model of inculturation of the Church in India?

The last chapter concludes our research by drawing inferences and presenting answers in which the relevance and implications of our findings for the wider context of Catholic theology are briefly discussed.

1.4. Outline of Chapters

We are investigating the contribution of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement to the inculturation of the Catholic Church in India in the area of building a community of

2 R.J. SCHREITER, *The New Catholicity. Theology between the Global and the Local*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1997, p. 79. J. Leonhoff originally developed this semiotic model of cultural dimensions, and Schreiter explicates it for the use of local theologies.

faith and thereby to find out to what extent it can become a model for the Church in India. The first chapter introduces the question behind our research, sets out the methodology, surveys earlier research in the field, and presents the criteria for successful inculturation.

In order to understand the context and background of our investigation we have to deal with the history of the inculturation of the Church in India in the area of community building. The survey of the earlier efforts of inculturation will make clear in what respects the *Khrist Bhakta* movement differs from those earlier movements. Therefore, our second chapter is devoted to the setting of the background for our research, giving an overview of the present situation of Christianity in India, and how Christians are perceived. Besides clarifying terms such as “inculturation” and “Church,” it will present a brief summary of the earlier efforts of inculturation (including that of the *āśram* movement) by some prominent individuals as well as the Catholic Church in India corporately under the guidance of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India. An evaluation of those efforts and the presentation of the longing for a suitable model of the Church in India will follow.

The third chapter speaks about the birth of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement. It begins by elaborately laying out the theoretical dimensions and the methodological framework we had applied in the process of collecting the data from the field and then speaks about the birth of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement. Unlike earlier efforts of inculturation, which were from top to bottom, done by the elites or leaders of the Church, the *Khrist Bhakta* movement was spread by the people by word of mouth from bottom up. It is a movement encompassing of about 50,000 to 60,000 people. However, it did not spring up unexpectedly. Several agencies and events have contributed to its formation and development. This chapter gives the details of its rise from its inception to its present form, its history and structure, the roles played by various agents, and the vision of leaders concerning its future.

Chapter four begins with the theoretical approach adopted in analysing and interpreting the data. It gives the details of Christianity as practiced and experienced by the Hindu devotees of Christ. The daily, weekly, monthly, and annual spiritual practices at home, in the *āśram* and in the villages, followed by their spiritual experiences are described here. Faith in Christ has its personal, social, and cultural consequences, which are manifested in their lives as well as in their festivities and rites of passage. After describing the movement, we have made a broadened evaluation of the movement in respect of its strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities in order to clarify our understanding. *Khrist Bhaktas* are living in an overlapping world of Hinduism and Christianity. The expression of their faith comes from both these worlds. Therefore, we have interpreted the movement in such a way as to find out to which framework their faith-expressions and cultural expressions belong. The earlier efforts of inculturation in India were a failure precisely because the ideological principles of Hinduism and Christianity are not similar. Hinduism is not a religion in the same way as

Christianity is. Inculturation, as we understand it today, can be successful when the distinction between religion and culture is taken into account. The framework of Hinduism does not allow such distinction or it works on a different principle from that of the Christian worldview. Therefore, we have given a short presentation of both the Hindu and the Christian frameworks. Thereafter we have shown whether the elements in the faith practices of the *Khrist Bhaktas* belong to a Hindu framework, Christian framework, or even a mixture of the two. Our interpretation also looked for possible indicators of any shift of worldview from one to the other. In order to help us inspect and identify the elements behind the religious practices, we have made use of the contributions from scholars such as Robert Schreiter and Clifford Geertz. Taking into account their particular form of Christianity, we have, therefore, made an evaluation of the movement to determine whether this can be considered as a successful model of inculturation. This evaluation presupposes some criteria for whether and when an inculturation can be considered successful or not. The details of the frameworks, the theoretical constructs, and how the criteria were developed are presented towards the end of this chapter.

The fifth chapter is an attempt to depict the hidden ecclesiology of this way of being church. Since the ecclesiology of the movement is not made explicit, we have researched deep into the movement to unearth the implicit ecclesiological dimensions by reflecting on its nature, structure, agents, and practices besides examining its Christological and Pneumatological basis. These discussions and reflections will lead up to the question of whether this movement can be considered as a model for *ecclesia* in India. It brings us face to face with the sacramental theology concerning Baptism and the Eucharist. The devotees, although not baptised, display a strong Eucharist-oriented life with adoration of the Blessed Sacrament attaining cardinal significance in every prayer meeting called *satsaṅg*. We are confronted with questions such as, why do the devotees not accept baptism, why do the leaders not advocate baptism, what to make of the desire of the devotees to receive the Eucharist and not Baptism, what should be the attitude towards the future of this movement, and in the absence of baptism can this movement still be called “*ecclesia*”? Therefore, we make an enquiry into the theological, canonical, and pastoral implications of these issues towards the end of this chapter.

The last chapter is our general conclusion, which brings closure to the topics of our discussion. After restating the thesis and our answers, we briefly state the importance of our study and finally give our general concluding remarks.

The phenomena of *Khrist Bhaktas* have attracted a growing interest among the scholarly community over the past few years. Some research studies have been conducted on these themes. Therefore, this introductory chapter ends with a survey of earlier research on *Khrist Bhaktas* in order to map the field of research as well as establish my orientation within this, followed by a presentation of the criteria for successful inculturation as a basis for evaluating the *Khrist Bhakta* movement.

1.5. Earlier Research

Four researchers, namely, Herbert E. Hofer, Jonas Adelin Jørgensen, Dasan Jeyeraj, and Jerome Sylvester have accomplished scholarly studies related to the *Khrist Bhakta* movement in India³. Taking each of these studies in their chronological order, we shall summarize their principal points and evaluate them.

1.5.1. Herbert E. Hofer

The first research on the above-mentioned theme was carried out by Herbert E. Hofer in 1981, published in 1991, with a re-edition published in 2001, entitled *Churchless Christianity*⁴. Hofer is a US citizen belonging to the Lutheran Church and was a missionary in India from 1968 to 1983. In India, he taught at the Concordia Teachers Training Institute of the Indian Evangelical Lutheran Church until 1975 and then served in the Gurukul Theological College, Chennai until 1983.

His book is divided into four sections. The first two sections describe the life- circumstances and belief-patterns of the Non-Baptised Believers in Christ (NBBC). The first section has two chapters of which the first chapter briefly sets out the story of his visits and interviews with the NBBCs. The author gives 20 different incidents of his meeting with the NBBCs in several villages of Tamil Nadu and in the city of Madras (presently called Chennai) in Tamil Nadu. The second chapter presents the portraits of the NBBCs. Since the people interviewed are from different religious, cultural, and geographical backgrounds, he has classified them in this chapter. He sees social reasons, especially the family and community, as explaining why they remain outside the Church.

Section two is devoted to the presentation of the NBBCs in the city of Madras. This section has two chapters. The first one (chapter three) gives the highlights of the questionnaire used for survey. It is followed by a brief description of the general data on Hindus, Muslims, and others, and finally gives cross-table data, which show how people accept, worship, and prefer to learn more about faith. Based on this data and analysis the author concludes that Madras is a Christian city because of the solid 25% of the Hindu and Muslim population in Madras city who have integrated Jesus into their spiritual lives, apart from the baptised Christian population, which makes up one-third of the “churchless Christianity”⁵.

3 KERRY P.C. SAN CHIRICO defended his dissertation entitled *Between Christian and Hindu. Khrist Bhaktas, Catholics, Hindus, and the Negotiation of Devotion in the Banaras Region*, from the University of California, Santa Barbara in 2012, which came to my notice in 2013 by which time the writing of the present work, had been almost completed. Therefore I was not able to make an assessment of the work.

4 H.E. HOEFER, *Churchless Christianity*, California, William Carey Library, 2001.

5 *Ibid.* p. 106.

The third and fourth sections are used for theological and practical reflections “in order to stimulate a larger process of reflection rather than to attempt any arguments toward conclusive reformulations”⁶. The reflections in chapter five state that the first discernment one must make is that the problem we are faced with in regard to the NBBCs is a sociological one rather than a theological one. Hoefer wants the church leaders to look upon the caste system positively, as the social system in India. He says that when properly used, the caste system proved greatest assistance in evangelization. Therefore, what is needed is creative, practical planning on how we can affirm the utility of the caste system without, at the same time, affirming untouchability or hierarchisation.

Chapter six establishes the need for new missiological structures, new missiological church nurture, new missiological strategy, and a new missiological vision for the church. Without specifying the new structures, Hoefer calls for experimentation at the local level. In order to nurture churchless Christianity, he proposes to produce special literature, broadcast special radio programs, hold special mass-meetings and retreats, widely distribute pictures of Jesus as well as Bibles, keep the churches open from early morning to late night, and make sure a priest is available at the Christian temple for special prayers and answering enquires, etc. This way the complete organizational structure of the church will be oriented toward the nurture of the much greater number of “sheep” outside the fold of the church⁷. Concerning the strategy in evangelization, the author says that rather than preaching forgiveness of sin and hope of heaven, one should proclaim peace of mind and heart and healing of mind, emotions, and body. Preaching should also include a new strength for leading a better moral life, and the experience of Jesus’ love in miraculous visions and dreams by showing that Christ can lead us to God-realization. In addition, the new missiological vision for the church includes participation in all the cultural life of the people and development of a “Christ-ized” Hindu culture. He says that the real move toward such an indigenous Christian faith can never come from the Christian community but must grow out of the “churchless Christianity”, with the help and encouragement of the church. He advises that the strategy and implementation of mission must be as comprehensive and long-term as is the plan of God. Otherwise, we win one in such a way that turns thousands away. He has supported these reflections with plenty of quotes and references from the Bible.

The fourth section was added in the 2001 edition, which gives further reflections. The seventh chapter is an answer to his speculative question: “If you could envision an India won for Christ, what would its religious life be like?” He answers that the religious life would be as different from the religious life of the West as the entire culture is different. Chapter eight and ten are papers presented by Hoefer at a conference in Chennai in 2000, where he was asked to present an analysis of the deficiencies of the missionary heritage so that new approaches

6 *Ibid.* p. 144.

7 *Ibid.* pp. 192-193.

might be considered. Chapter nine is meant to explain to western Christians the implications of caste and why Indians do not want to leave the caste for the sake of faith. The concluding chapter is a review written by H.L. Richard on the 1991 edition of the book.

The book does not present itself as a comprehensive whole. The first section has very little significance for the rest of the book. It is more or less like a traveler's diary. The author himself agrees that the first study was "conducted in a random sample manner leaving much to the discretion of the pastors and the availability of NBBCs. Therefore, I [the author] decided to carry out a scientific study in the city of Madras"⁸.

The second study claims to have covered all of Madras City. However, the author in the introduction acknowledges that the actual survey was carried out by three female graduate students during the hot month of June. Conducting a survey of an entire city like that of Madras in one month by three (female) students seems to be too improbable, and nothing is mentioned about the actual areas of the city where the study was conducted.

Based on 32 out of 726 people who were interviewed who said that they worshiped only Jesus, the author concludes that Madras is a Christian city. Additionally, his data show that only 13.50% of the people have strong disagreement with the statement "Jesus is the only way". However, he overlooks the 68.46% of people who disagree with the statement to some extent⁹. His conclusions seem to be exaggerated.

The larger part of the book is devoted to his reflections which betray a kind of missionary attitude on how to evangelize rather than a scholarly study. The author seems to be preoccupied about what topics should be preached to the Hindus to attract them to Christianity. The study does not do justice to the phenomenon of the non-baptised. It is concerned with how to make them members of the church. The content and style of the reflections are sandwiched with quotations from the Bible. Hoefler does not support his reflections by the findings of the research in the respective field and thus it sounds more like a homily than an academic work¹⁰.

1.5.2. Jonas Adelin Jørgensen

Jonas Adelin Jørgensenon's study called *Jesus Imandars and Christ Bhaktas: Two Case Studies of Interreligious Hermeneutics and Identity in Global Christianity*, was defended at the Faculty of Theology, University of Copenhagen

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 69.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 294.

¹⁰ Dasan Jeyaraj has already presented some other shortcomings of this research and its statistics. See D. JEYARAJ, *Followers of Christ Outside the Church in Chennai, India*, Utrecht, Utrecht University, 2009, p. 37.

gen¹¹. His research is centred on the questions of how globalization and polycentric appearance of contemporary Christianity and the increased interaction with other religions affect Christian self-understanding as well as understanding of truth and value in other religious traditions¹². His “core hypothesis” is that the transformation of Christianity has made it impossible to speak of a Christian identity (in the singular) but at the same time raised the question of possible Christian identities (in the plural). These possible Christian identities and Christianities are products of negotiation and hybridity through a syncretic process¹³.

Jørgensen’s book is divided into seven chapters (although he says in the introduction that it has only six chapters). The first chapter is a small introduction in which he presents the structure and methodology of his book. Chapter two is devoted to an appraisal of four theoretical concepts, namely, globalization, identity, pluralism, and interreligious hermeneutics, which he considers as helpful in understanding the transformation of Christianity. Chapter three is dedicated to his main analytical concept, syncretism. He presents a historical overview of the use of syncretism as a concept as well as a review of literature on syncretism as a concept to analyse transformations of religion. He discusses the concept of syncretism from the perspective of history of religions, cultural anthropology, and Christian theology. Chapter four describes the methods he chose for his research and his reasons for choosing the two methods he used, namely, participant observation and semi-structured qualitative interviews. He also gives the concrete field procedures, discussion of relation to informants, and ethical considerations. Chapter five presents the first empirical study on Jesus *Imandars* in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The Jesus *Imandars* are those Muslims in Bangladesh who emphasize faithfulness (*imandari*) to Jesus above all other considerations. They emphasize the essential value of interiority and personal faithfulness towards God through following Jesus¹⁴. The religious practices of three groups of Jesus *Imandars* are presented in three parts. They concern the description and analysis of liturgy and personal ideal, the conversion stories and perspectives on commitment, and their ecclesiology and social identity. This is followed by an analysis and a conclusion that the *Imandars* engage actively in a syncretic process in the construction of an “Islamic” and “Bengali” style of faith in Jesus, resulting in indigenization and Christianization at the same time.

The second empirical study is presented in chapter six on the Christ *Bhaktas* in Chennai, India. This chapter has three sub-sections of which the first one is an introduction to the religious and social environment of Chennai. The second section is a detailed description of the syncretic process that surfaces among the *Bhaktas*. The third section is a more thorough discussion of the overall syncretic

11 Jonas Adelin Jørgensen is a Danish Protestant theologian working as an assistant research professor in Systematic Theology at the Theological Faculty, University of Copenhagen. He teaches global Christianity, mission theology, and theology of religions.

12 J.A. JØRGENSEN, *Jesus Imandars and Christ Bhaktas. Two Case Studies of Interreligious Hermeneutics and Identity in Global Christianity*, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 2008, p. 3.

13 *Ibid.* p. 4.

14 *Ibid.* p. 169.

process. The overall aims of the author are threefold: to offer a description of the practice and theology of the Christ *Bhaktas*, which they themselves would approve, to analyse how the *Bhaktas* engage in the syncretic process, and to analyse the interreligious hermeneutic underlying their syncretistic practice¹⁵. The seventh and last chapter is dedicated to conclusions. Concerning the relationship between Christianity and other religions, he is not content with the existing tripartite model of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism and wants to present a new model, which he calls a refined model of syncretic processes, which is at the same time a revised model for Christian interreligious hermeneutics. This model stimulates reflection on the meaning of other religious traditions and typifies a number of interreligious relationships through which believers engage in interpretation of other religious systems. This model, according to Jørgensen, does not qualify or disqualify any single hermeneutical mode; rather, it limits itself to point out a typology of possible modes of interaction and points out the importance of syncretistic processes as a starting point for understanding and modelling interreligious hermeneutics and, consequently, a Christian theology of religions¹⁶.

The study of Christ *Bhaktas* of Chennai is limited to one chapter of the book. In Chennai, Jørgensen had interviewed 18 men and 5 women once, and three of them more than once, whom he calls his “key informants”. Thus, the study is based on a meagre number of 23 people from the metropolitan city. Even this small number is one sided since 18 were men and only five were women. The author makes conclusions and generalizations based on the study of very small number of people. Any conclusion based on a study of 23 people from a metropolitan city, which has an urban agglomeration of 10 million people (according to the 2001 census), has to be treated with extra discretion and caution.

The author does not specify how many Christ *Bhaktas* are in the city and in which part of the city his 23 respondents live. He does not mention the number of *maṇḍlīs* existing. He has attended just one *maṇḍlī* consisting of six members who the author claims belong to the “high caste”. The author says that 10 respondents belong to high castes without, however, giving their full names, which would make it possible to recognize their caste identity. The caste identity is very strong in India. People from higher castes prefer to use their caste names always with their maiden names. It seems Jørgensen could not find out the real caste names and missed the caste implications for Indian society. The study lacks detailed information required for scholarly discussion.

In his presentation of the material, more attention is given to the analysis of the word *bhakti*, which is related to liturgy. Jørgensen does so based on the only *maṇḍlī* he attended and the hymns they sang, albeit he has included the explanations given by three informants. It seems he has depended on these informants

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 261.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 431.

who explained their versions of *bhakti*. Nevertheless, how acceptable their explanations of *bhakti* are to other devotees and *maṇḍlīs*, if at all, is not clear.

Although he calls his clients Christ devotees, they do not really meet the definition of Christ devotees. All of his respondents had been converted and baptised to Christianity before he met them. Some of them were members of institutional missionary churches and others attend revival meetings and prayers in independent charismatic churches while attending the *maṇḍlī*. It is clear that those whom the researcher calls *Bhaktas* are, in fact, not Hindu *Bhaktas* or members of other religions but are or were members of a church or a Christian denomination¹⁷. We can at most believe that the research shows the existence of some *maṇḍlīs* where devotees who were formerly or presently attached to one or the other Christian denominations are gathering in small numbers. Jørgensen fails to situate his data in a larger context. The insignificant number of respondents reduces the significance of the study. The impression one gets from reading his research is that he uses the small data from Chennai in order to show that Christian identity is formed by negotiation of hybridity through a syncretic process.

1.5.3. Dasan Jayaraj

The research carried out by Dasan Jeyaraj on *Followers of Christ Outside the Church in Chennai, India: A Socio-Historical Study of a Non-Church Movement*, was defended in 2009 in the Faculty of Theology, Utrecht University, the Netherlands¹⁸. This work is classified into two sections and further divided into six chapters.

The first chapter presents the preliminaries such as the methodology, terminology, structure of study, presentation of the problems, etc. The second chapter is devoted to the discussion of seven theologians and the movement called *Yesu Darbār*. The seven selected theologians were critical of the Church and at the same time committed to Christ. They are Brahmabandhav Upadhyay, Narayan Vamana Tilak, Manilal C. Parekh, Pandippedi Chenchiah, Rajendra Chandra Das, Kalagara Subha Rao, and *Svāmī* Dayanand Bharati. The first five expressed their faith by accepting baptism. Upadhyay accepted baptism in the Catholic Church while Tilak was baptised into the American Marathi Mission of the Presbyterian Church. Parekh joined the Anglican Church while Chenchiah was baptised into the United Free Church of Scotland (Scottish Presbyterian denomination). R.C. Das took baptism as a Baptist and later joined the Anglican Communion before joining the Pentecostal group of the American Church of God and finally ended up in the Banaras United City Mission and started the Kristpanthi *āśram* at Banaras. K.S. Rao did not accept baptism and Bharati accepted baptism in the Methodist Church but did not attend any church and has remained outside the church.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 269.

¹⁸ Dasan Jeyaraj is a Protestant theologian who is now the coordinator, Master Theology in Mission at the Indian Institute of Missiology, Trichy, India.

All of them remained critical of the church and eventually moved to the periphery, thus paving the way for the non-church movement¹⁹.

Thereafter, Jeyaraj presents the *Yesu Darbār*, which is a movement very similar to the *Khrisht Bhakta* movement. The *Yesu Darbār* was started a few years after the emergence of the *Khrisht Bhakta* movement. It was started by Rajendra Bihari Lal, who is the vice-chancellor of the Allahabad Agricultural Institute, which was deemed a university in 2000. The *Darbār* was given the name in 2002. It was started as a small prayer group of five to six people and grew to 20 in 2002. Soon, healings happened in the meetings and the number of people attending grew dramatically. Dr. Lal was anointed as the bishop of *Yesu Darbār* by Dr. Mani Jacob, the chairman of the board of directors of the above-mentioned university. The strength of the movement increased to approximately 50,000 people but had decreased to 40,000 when the researcher visited them in 2005. He further observes that the number is “rapidly dwindling”²⁰. Barring a very small introduction about the movement, hardly any study is made on it.

The second part of the book has no relation to the first. Hence, Freek Bakker in a book review considers them as two separate books²¹. Chapter three presents the sociological enquiry conducted in 2002 in ten of the pin code regions of the city of Chennai, India. After introducing the city, a brief history of Christianity in Chennai is given. A total of 12,166 respondents were asked to choose their religious leader from the list of 12 choices given to them. The study also includes responses to the question, “From whom do respondents prefer to learn religion?” A comparative study is then made between the general choices of religious leaders and the choices of leaders from whom the respondents prefer to learn religion.

Chapter four presents the further study of those people who declared Jesus Christ as their only religious leader while their religious background was other than Christianity. Such respondents were 390 out of the 12,166. The chapter presents the study on their sources and instruments to knowing Jesus, their relationship to Jesus, their devotional practices, their needs in relation to their faith, and their reasons for remaining outside the church.

Chapter five is devoted to the attitude of the organized church towards the followers of Christ outside the church. It is achieved by analysing the interviews carried out in Chennai among the pastors, first generation Christians, and mission leaders. The 88 respondents were asked about the various socio-cultural practices of followers of Christ outside the church, the issue of caste, and the reasons they see for the followers to remain outside the church.

The last chapter presents the author’s view about rethinking the mission of the organized church in India based on the non-church movement of the followers of Christ. He presents the significance of this movement for the church, its mission, and for the society. On the one hand, it deals with how the followers of

19 JEYARAJ, *Followers of Christ outside the Church in Chennai, India*, p. 197.

20 *Ibid.* p. 150.

21 F.L. BAKKER, ‘Review of Followers of Christ. Outside the Church in Chennai, India. A Socio-Historical Study of a Non-Church Movement by Dasan Jeyaraj’, in *Exchange*, 39, 2010, 1, pp. 95-99.

Christ view Christ and, on the other hand, the responsibility of the church to these followers.

In the survey of Dasan Jeyaraj, the majority of the respondents (74.74%) were women, of which 61.83% were housewives and 13.42% were students. In Chennai, the female population is in the minority while the researcher has a majority of women as his respondents.

The first question in the questionnaire was meant to identify the preferred religious leader from a given list of 12. Although the respondents were overwhelmingly Hindus, the list did not have the name of any of the popular *avātārs* or gods of Hinduism, such as Rām, Kriṣṇ, Hanumān, Gaṇeś, and so on. Interestingly, the names of Christ, Mohammad, and Buddha found a place in the list. Hinduism has many *avātārs* and popular gods. Each individual has his or her favourite god called *iṣṭdevātā*. While making a survey with limited options in a questionnaire, it is arguable whether the researcher has given sufficient consideration to the worldview of Hinduism. The idea of God and the concept of *avātār* are important for this worldview. It has thousands of gurus, many gods, and goddesses. The questionnaire had limited scope to point out the respondents' preference. It was limited to the historical persons. Besides, the majority of respondents were women (74.74%) and a good number were from uneducated and "backward" classes (59.74%) who may not have been able to distinguish the implications of the question concerning their religious leader. Even Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India and who is not considered a religious leader, finds favour as a religious leader in the column of other religious leaders. Hence, the description of who is considered a religious leader is not clear and too complex to understand for many interviewed respondents, which shows the shortcoming of the survey method used.

The researcher calls the followers of Christ outside the church a non-church movement²². The author claims that the 390 followers of Christ outside the church identified from the 12,166 respondents surveyed in this study in 10 pin code regions of Chennai establishes this point. This figure demonstrates that although Christianity is only 2.3% of the total population in India, in a city like Chennai, 8.44% of people who are outside the church believe in Jesus. However, these devotees do not gather in one place, they do not have any common programmes, and they have no common threads for binding them. They may not even have the same view about Christ. We do not know if their number is on the increase or decrease, whether they try to evangelize others, etc. They cannot be called a community or a group and this hardly stands the test of being a movement. They are individuals devoted to Christ in their own individual and personal manner.

We could say that it is a phenomenon or a trend in Indian culture that many people are attracted to Christ (see our section on mild perception, 2.3.1). How can this phenomenon be called a movement when the members share hardly any-

22 JEYARAJ, *Followers of Christ outside the Church in Chennai*, p. 197, 413.

thing in common and know practically nothing about the other? They are all individual members spread out in ten pin code areas of a metropolitan city with a population of more than 10 million. The study, therefore, shows that among the total population of a city there are some people scattered among the population who consider Jesus as their God.

Jeyaraj does not consider the movement as a model of church, but wants the church to see that Christ is present also outside the church. In addition, he wants the devotees to remain as devotees for witnessing to their families and communities.

His concluding reflections focus on practical adjustments to be made in the strategy and methods of evangelization. He suggests keeping the churches open, introducing an Indian style of singing, and removing shoes in the church. These are rather too simple to be scholarly contributions. He does not reflect on the theological questions underlying his findings. He pleads for having a good attitude towards the non-baptised believers, but does not specify what kind of attitude is required, although the leaders he interviewed had already shown a positive attitude towards them.

1.5.4. Jerome Sylvester

In 2012, Jerome Sylvester, from the Department of Christian Studies, University of Madras, India, prepared another PhD research thesis examining the *Khrish Bhakta* movement²³. The title of the work is, *Hermeneutics of Khrish Bhakta Movement: A Subaltern Reading of the Religio-Cultural Phenomenon in Varanasi*. The thesis was defended successfully, but has not yet been published²⁴. However, from my personal interview with the author, I was able to gain a glimpse into the work.

The thesis is divided into six chapters. The first one is the introductory and methodological chapter providing the reader with the structure of the study, and the qualitative and quantitative methods used. Chapter two is entitled, “The phenomenon of the *Khrish Bhakta* movement”, and has two sub-sections of which the first describes the *Khrish Bhakta* movement with its background, while the second describes the history and demography of the *Khrish Bhakta* movement. It also presents the results of his interview with 350 people and his several formal and informal interviews with several individuals and groups of *Khrish Bhaktas*. Chapter three is titled the Gospel of the *Khrish Bhakta* Movement, which discusses how the *Khrish Bhaktas* use and interpret the Bible. He typifies their hermeneutics as folkloristic. Chapter four is called the “negotiation of the rituals among the *Khrish Bhakta* movement”. This chapter discusses the liminal position of the

23 Jerome Sylvester is a Catholic theologian who lives in Varanasi. At present, he is the Rector of Gyan Bharti, the IMS Regional Theologate, which is an extension centre of Vidya Jyoti, College of Theology, Delhi, India.

24 When the present researcher contacted him in April 2013, Jerome Sylvester hoped to get it published in 2013.

Khrist Bhaktas both within Hinduism and in Christianity. The author shows that the *Bhaktas* are living at the margins of both Hinduism and Christianity. Chapter five discusses the appropriation of faith by the *Khrist Bhaktas* where the Christ experience of the devotees is discussed theologically. Chapter six is the concluding chapter, which is titled, “The significance of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement”.

Taking a socio-cultural point of view, the author seeks the reasons for the emergence of the movement. He says that it has emerged from “subaltern stress”. The *Khrist Bhaktas* are economically poor, socially marginalized, and religiously isolated. Hence, they are in search of a new identity. The various religious *bhakti* movements provide opportunities for marginalized people to gain a new identity and so they have had greater impact and influence in this area of the country. Buddhists, Jainists, followers of Ambedkar, etc., all have had their influence and presence in Banaras. It has also resulted in gaining an attitude of openness among the general population towards different religions. Moreover, all these have created the possibility of creating a new identity.

He finds the devotees at the periphery of the established religions and culture. The movement originated as a religio-cultural response of the marginalized people in their search for a new identity. The type of discipleship emerging from the *Khrist Bhakta* movement is different from the conventional membership in the church. He concludes that the *Khrist Bhaktas* negotiate the borders of faith and culture for empowerment against social exclusion and marginalization. Overall stress is on the significance of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement in enhancing the agency of the subaltern for redefining their identity.

The above-mentioned studies by Jørgensen, Jayaraj, and Hoefer speak about individuals who have accepted Christ as saviour and who are spread across a city²⁵. The 23 people mentioned by Jonas Adelin Jørgensen, and the 390 mentioned by Dasan Jeyaraj are not part of any movement. Neither they nor their *maṇḍlīs* are related to one another. Our study is about people who gather in one place in thousands for a community *satsaṅg* and gather as well at home in the villages for weekly village prayer meetings. It is about a movement and not about a few unrelated individuals in a metropolitan city. Although the study by Jerome Sylvester is about the same group phenomenon, he is studying its social aspect. The author looks at it from a socio-cultural point of view to find out the reasons for the emergence of the movement. This complements our study where we do not look into the sociological side of the movement. We are looking at the movement *per se* particularly from the point of inculturation, community building, and ecclesiology.

The theologians who completed the first three research studies approached it from a Protestant perspective. Moreover, they conducted their research in the city of Madras/Chennai, which is called the most Christianized city of India.

25 Hoefer speaks about *maṇḍlī* in his second study at Madras City. However, the members of the *maṇḍlī* either are Christians or at some point were members of one or the other Christian denominations, and many of them are still attending the Church.

Chennai is a city which lies in the southern state of Tamil Nadu. South India is traditionally held to have the “Dravidian culture”²⁶. It has its own language family and cultural tradition, with its own literature, philosophy, style of sculpture, architecture, painting, music, dance forms, cuisine, and clothing. Our study is from a Catholic perspective in the city of Varanasi, North India. Chennai and Varanasi are separated by around 1834 kms, and it takes an average of 38 hours by train to travel from one city to the other. Varanasi is said to be the spiritual capital of Hinduism. North Indian culture is predominantly Aryan, which has its own languages and other cultural traditions. The lingua franca in North India is Hindi. We have already given our critical observations about the earlier research and do not repeat them here. Except for Sylvester, others were making a hermeneutical study of the phenomenon of individual *Khrist Bhaktas*. They wanted the churches to change their strategy of evangelization. We have also shown the complementarities of the study by Sylvester. We look at the movement from an ecclesiological point of view.

Our hypothesis is that the *Khrist Bhakta* movement presents a successful model of inculturation in the area of community building. However, judging the movement as a successful/unsuccessful model of inculturation requires some principles and criteria, which we shall illustrate now.

1.6. Criteria for inculturation in the Area of Community Building

It may not be possible to find a cut out final criterion for a successful inculturation in the area of community building, as no single criterion can be established, given the diversity of cultures and the complexity of the Christian tradition.²⁷ Moreover, no contextualization done in any place can lay claim to authoritative finality²⁸. However, it does not mean we cannot have some guidelines and principles to guide a possible effective inculturation²⁹.

Our search for criteria for good inculturation will start with an enquiry into the contents of inculturation. We shall start our search by focussing on the Gospel, which is one of the important poles of inculturation, followed by a scrutiny of culture, which is the other important pole. Here, we shall be reminded of the spe-

26 Indian society is considered as having a basic division of Aryans who speak a language from the Aryan language family and who live mostly in North India, and Dravidians who speak a language from the Dravidian language family and who mostly live in South India. There are various and contested views about their racial origin. Some anthropologists consider these two groups as separate races while others challenge this view.

27 R.J. SCHREITER, *Constructing Local Theologies*, New York, Orbis Books, 1985, p. 117.

28 D.J. HESSELGRAVE & E. ROMMEN, *Contextualization. Meanings Methods and Models*, Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1989, p. 198.

29 We consider inculturation in a broad sense. We comply with the shift away from acculturation, i.e., the insertion of indigenous elements into patterns that are basically Western, to inculturation, i.e., the creation of indigenous patterns themselves. Aloysius Pieris reminds us that whoever thinks of inculturation not as an ecclesiastical expansion into non-Christian cultures but as the forging of an indigenous ecclesial identity from within the *soteriological* perspectives of Asian religions has begun moving in the right direction. See A. PIERIS, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, New York, Orbis Books, 1998, p. 55.

cific nature of Asia/India and give careful attention to the threefold realities of Asia. Thereafter, we shall deal with the process criteria and so our investigation shall discuss the role of community and the roles experts play in the process of inculturation. While dealing with the community we shall also be able to formulate criteria for inculturation in the area of community building. Moreover, one has to learn lessons from previous attempts at inculturation so as to be vigilant against making similar mistakes. Therefore, we shall include here the lessons from previous attempts for inculturation in India. The Catholic Church is a communion of Churches and in every particular Church the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and active. Therefore, we shall include in our criteria the role and relation between universal and particular Churches with regard to inculturation. Finally, Indian and Asian theologians view Church in relationship and in subordination to the Kingdom of God. Therefore, we shall include in our criteria the focus on Kingdom of God in the efforts for inculturation.

In the formulation and development of criteria, we shall give priority and importance to the areas and aspects stressed by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences³⁰ and Indian theologians. Moreover, on the one hand, we are looking for the positive criteria; on the other hand, our investigation shall be looking at the negative criteria simultaneously, to make sure that we do not fall into any pitfalls. Therefore, wherever appropriate, we start each section of our research with examining the positive criteria and end with assessing the negative criteria.

1.6.1. Content Criteria

Most of the theologians agree that the two important poles of inculturation are the Gospel message and the culture³¹. Christian inculturation that is both authentic and effective has to be based on a careful attention to both the Gospel and the respondent culture³². Christianity is both universal and local at the same time. The question at stake is universality and particularity³³. Any inculturation thus has to be faithful, on the one hand, to the Gospel message, which is universal, and, on the other hand, to the local culture, which is particular.

1.6.1.1. Faithfulness to the Gospel

30 Hereafter shortened as FABC.

31 P. JOSEPH, 'Mission as Inculturation', in J. MATTAM & S. KIM (eds.), *Dimensions of Mission in India*, Bombay, St. Pauls, 1995, p. 157.

32 HESSELGRAVE & ROMMEN, *Contextualization*, p. 211. See also P. TOVEY, *Inculturation of Christian Worship. Exploring the Eucharist*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2004, pp. 2-6; J.H. PRANGER, *Redeeming Tradition. Inculturation, Contextualization and Tradition*, Groningen, Rijksuniversiteit, 2003, pp. 167-192; P.R. SARPONG, *Peoples Differ. An Approach to Inculturation in Evangelization*, Legon, Sub-Saharan Publications, 2002, pp. 21-32.

33 The one faith has to be made at home in every culture and, for our purpose, it has to find its home in India and, at the same, it is not to be made identical with it.

Positive Criteria

Making the Gospel relevant for the people is the first and foremost objective in inculturation. Therefore, in every inculturation the Church tries to be faithful to the Gospel. Although the term faithfulness is a slippery concept, the criterion of faithfulness to the Gospel requires that the text be interpreted in line with the tradition of the Church and in such a way that it tries to be loyal to the meaning of the text. It is also primarily a matter of interpreting the text by the application of sound hermeneutical principles³⁴. This means that there are some essential truths which are not to be compromised³⁵. For example, on the one hand, the centrality of faith in Jesus Christ cannot be negotiated while, on the other hand, it requires freedom on non-essential elements. For Aylward Shorter, one of the basic conditions of successful inculturation is the guarantee of a supreme freedom in non-essentials³⁶. However, it is a difficult task to decide and judge between the DNA of the Gospel and the husk. What is the DNA for one culture could be the husk for another³⁷. Charles Taber thinks of good inculturation as one that sharpens the focus of the Gospel while bad inculturation confuses the Gospel³⁸.

The subject of inculturation is not the Gospel, in the sense of a core or essence rationally paraphrased into propositional form³⁹. It is not “a theological treatise, but a history, at the centre of which is a God-man, born in Bethlehem and raised up in Jerusalem”⁴⁰. The Gospel is good news about Christ and Christ alone is ultimately essential⁴¹. What is inculturated is Jesus Christ himself. In addition, it has to be kept in mind that the words, deeds, and example of Christ are mediated through the believing community⁴². Therefore, what is important is Christ and His message as presented in the New Testament and interpreted throughout the centuries by the community of faithful. Thus, faithfulness to the Gospel shall become the first and foremost criteria for inculturation.

Negative Criteria

34 HESSELGRAVE & ROMMEN, *Contextualization*, p. 211.

35 H.G. HUGHES, *Essentials and Non-Essentials of Catholic Religion*, Charleston, Bibliolife, 2009, p. 8. See also J. CAMPBELL, ‘Releasing the Gospel from the Western Bondage’, in *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 16, 1999-2000, 4, p. 170; B.J. NICHOLLS, *Contextualization. A Theology of Gospel and Culture*, Vancouver, Regent College Publishing, 2003, p. 58.

36 A. SHORTER, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1988, p. 256.

37 PIERIS, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 52.

38 C.R. TABER, ‘The Limits of Indigenization in Theology’, in *Missiology* 6, 1978, 1, p. 54.

39 A. SHORTER, ‘Inculturation the Premise of Universality’, in C. CORNILLE & V. NECKEBROUCK (eds.), *A Universal Faith? Peoples, Cultures Religions and the Christ*, Louvain, Peeters/ [Grand Rapids], W.B. Eerdmans, [1992], p. 14. See also for the details about the relationship between the three cultures, namely the missionary’s culture, the respondent culture and the Biblical culture in D.J. HESSELGRAVE, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1978, pp. 67-78.

40 T. PRESLER, ‘Christianity Rediscovered. A Reflection on Vincent Donovan’s Contribution to Missiology’, in *Missiology* 18, 1990, 3, p. 272.

41 SHORTER, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, p. 60.

42 *Ibid.* p. 65.

In inculturation the Gospel should not be used in a fragmentary or selective way. Sometimes certain groups or movements use selective passages from the Bible and interpret them without reference to the tradition of the Church. Therefore, it is important to be aware of the selective use and interpretation of the Gospel⁴³. “A culture must encounter the whole Gospel and not choose few elements selectively and ignore the rest with which a culture is not comfortable”⁴⁴.

Interpretation should also not be done in a fundamentalist way either. The use of human reason, the role of the community or the *sensus fidelium* and the tradition should not be neglected. Mostly, fundamentalists interpret the Bible in a literal sense and oppose any kind of critical methods to understand the scripture. Such interpretations of the text should be avoided as it obscures the literary aspects and, consequently, the primary meaning of the text, and also fails to see the human element in the text.

1.6.1.2. Faithfulness to the Culture

Positive Criteria

The other pole in inculturation is culture. Faithfulness to the values of culture means considering the culture of the people as central to their being and taking effort to preserve people in their culture⁴⁵. There is no consensus among anthropologists and sociologists over the definition of the term “culture”⁴⁶. Keeping in mind the difficulty in defining the term, we shall accept the general understanding of the term “culture,” namely, as the way of the life of the people, their worldview, and system of values. The very term inculturation itself points to the fact that the culture of the people is taken seriously and given a central stage, and no culture is considered as God-forsaken. As Karokaran points out, if culture and cultural identity are what constitute a people, we cannot separate the specific way of being people from their inner personhood⁴⁷.

The local culture becomes the focus and starting point of inculturation. The Gospel has to become meaningful to the culture of the people. Charles Taber considers a good inculturation as that which makes the message intelligible in

43 *Ibid.* p. 253.

44 JOSEPH, ‘Mission as Inculturation’, p. 166.

45 Robert Schreiter calls local theologies based on cultural identities ethnographic models. He points out four weaknesses of such models. First, they are often set out as projects and after the initial steps, are not pursued. Secondly, this approach can overlook the conflict factors in its environment. Thirdly, this approach may become prey to a cultural romanticism. Finally, much of the cultural analysis can be done only by experts and thus excludes the community. See SCHREITER, *Constructing Local Theologies*, pp. 13-15.

46 See for the details of the debate in A. SWIDLER, ‘Culture in Action. Symbols and Strategies’, in *American Sociological Review*, 15, 1986, 2, pp. 273-276 and R.M. KEESING ‘Theories of Culture’, in *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 3, 1974, pp. 73-93.

47 A. KAROKARAN, ‘Inculturation. Implications for Mission and Community Building’, in P. VADAKUMPADAN, M. KARIAPURAM & J. PUTHENPURAKAL (eds.), *Breaking New Ground in Mission*, Shillong, Vendrame Institute Publications & Don Bosco Centre for Indigenous Cultures, 2002, p. 87. See also the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, 58 & 59.

terms of the receptor categories of thought and imagery and relevant to the existential concerns of the receptor people⁴⁸. It considers the Gospel message as meaningful and compelling to the respondents in their cultural and existential situation⁴⁹. When described from a Christological point of view, it is focused as much on finding Christ already active in the culture as it is on bringing Christ to the culture⁵⁰. Without prejudice to the autonomy of the traditions of faith, it is the local culture and not Christianity's previous inculturations that should be made the starting point of the new processes⁵¹.

When people hear the good news and turn to God in Jesus Christ, they express their response creatively in a new way of life, community structures, rituals and celebrations, and spirituality⁵². "True inculturation is not copying external elements, but approaching the cultures with a positive attitude, discern the work of the spirit, foster it, purify it from human misconceptions and conditioning, inform it with Christian faith and thus make it truly and authentically Christian at the same time"⁵³. The Indian Theological Association considers religion as the core of Indian culture, and therefore inculturation certainly implies entry into the total religiousness or ethos of the people⁵⁴. Thus, the stress on local culture in the context of India calls us to consider the religion as part of culture and take it seriously. Only those elements that are dehumanizing are rejected while "accepting, assimilating, integrating and purifying the values found in the religions of other cultures"⁵⁵.

Negative criteria

By way of caution, we must be careful that the efforts should also not lead to culturalism or a kind of glorification of some cultures⁵⁶. Taking the culture seriously does not mean being blind to the inhuman elements in the culture. It also rules out the position that some cultures are perfect in all aspects. However, the possibility of mutual enrichment of the culture holds value.

Another danger to be avoided is eclecticism or the indiscriminate borrowing of unrelated ideas and practices from various sources⁵⁷. Inculturation should not be limited to copying of certain elements of a culture leading to dilution, superfi-

48 TABER, 'The Limits of Indigenization in Theology', p. 54.

49 HESSELGRAVE & ROMMEN, *Contextualization*, p. 211.

50 SCHREITER, *The New Catholicity*, p. 29.

51 SHORTER, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, p. 256.

52 M. AMALADOSS, 'Challenges of Mission in the 21st Century', in *Theology Digest*, 47, 2000, 1, p. 18.

53 V.F. VINEETH, 'Sutras on Christian Mission in the Indian Church', in *Word and Worship*, 34, 2001, 5& 6, p. 169. See also *Ad gentes*, 22.

54 Statement of the ITA, 17th Annual Meeting 1988 in *Indian Theological Studies*, 26, 1989, p. 80. See also W. BÜHLMANN, *The Church of the Future. A Model for the year 2001*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1986, p. 47.

55 L. BOFF, *Church Charism & Power. Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church*, London, SCM Press Ltd, 1985, p. 107.

56 *Ibid.*

57 *Ibid.* p. 43.

ciality, and confusion⁵⁸. It should not be either using or instrumentalizing a culture for evangelizing people as was done through accommodation and adaptation methods⁵⁹.

Although all the religions in the world are syncretistic to a certain extent, care must be taken that the efforts for inculturation should not lead to a negative syncretism. Considering the nature of Indian society there is a greater possibility of forming easy syncretistic religious forms. "The difference in the world view of Christians and the world view of the Hindus may result in misunderstanding and syncretism"⁶⁰. The danger of syncretism is especially great in India whose religious philosophy is based on the premise that all religions are fundamentally alike⁶¹.

1.6.1.2.1. Focus on the Threefold Realities of Asia

Faithfulness to culture requires that we give attention to the particular nature of local culture. The Asian Churches need to focus on the threefold realities of Asia, namely, the extreme poverty of the majority of poor, the several indigenous cultures, and existence of several religions⁶². For the Indian Theological Association, what also constitutes "Indianess" is the cultural and religious pluralism and poverty of the masses⁶³. The documents of the FABC speak about the necessity of building up indigenous local Churches in Asia. The criterion for the bishops to decide if a Church is truly indigenous and local is related to the above-mentioned threefold reality. They point out that "the dialogue with the religion and culture will enable them to touch the reality of Asian peoples' deepest selves and help them find authentic ways of living and expressing their Christian faith"⁶⁴. Culture is an integral part of a person's individual and social life with religion as its core and heart⁶⁵. Indeed, as the "heart and soul" of Asian culture, religion largely permeates the very "way of life" of the people. Religion cannot be separated from material or social culture since they are interrelated and dependent upon each other⁶⁶. "Given the great place of religion in culture, a local or particular Church implanted in a non-Christian socio-cultural milieu must take seriously

58 BOFF, *Church Charism & Power*, pp. 90-91.

59 KAROKARAN, 'Inculturation. Implications for Mission and Community Building', p. 87.

60 HESSELGRAVE & ROMMEN, *Contextualization*, p. 205.

61 J.W. GRANT, *God's People in India*, Madras, The Christian Literature Society, 1961, p. 42.

62 R.R. GAILLARDETZ, *Ecclesiology for a Global Church. A People Called and Sent*, New York, Orbis Books, 2008, p. 120.

63 1998 Statement of ITA, in *Jeevadhara* 19, 1989, pp. 72-83.

64 *Ibid.* pp. 14-15.

65 J. DUPUIS, 'Inculturation and Inter-Religious Dialogue in India Today', in C. CORNILLE & V. NECKEBROUCK (eds.), *A Universal Faith? Peoples, Cultures Religions and the Christ*, Louvain, Peeters/Wm.B. Eerdmans, p. 14. See also Sr. NAMEETA, 'When Being Christian Means Losing Everything you Love for Jesus' Sake. The Experience of Single Converts', in *Vidyajyoti* 67, 2003, 6, p. 438.

66 E.C. PENTECOST, *Issues in Missiology. An Introduction*, Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1982, p. 82.

into account the religious element of this milieu⁶⁷. Therefore, the religious ethos of the people should be taken into consideration in the efforts for inculturation.

FABC thinks of a dialogue of life with the poor of Asia also as a criterion for a truly local Church. This dialogue with the poor leads to a genuine commitment and effort to bring about social justice in the societies⁶⁸. Many theologians from Asia stress the need for integrating the elements of Indian religiosity and culture into the struggle for liberation⁶⁹. The theme of the Ninth Annual Meeting of the Indian Theological Association was “towards an Indian theology of liberation.” The statement of the association stresses the need for solidarity with the oppressed and of commitment to their cause⁷⁰. Aloysius Pieris wants the Churches in Asia to learn religiosity from the Asian gurus by sitting at their feet. He also wants the Asian Churches to live in solidarity with the religious poor of Asia. Thus, in the thinking of Asian theologians and bishops, the Church is truly local when it is incarnate in a people. It is a process of continuous, humble, and living dialogue with the living traditions, cultures, and religions, in brief, with all the life realities of the people into whose midst it has sunk its roots deeply and whose history and life it gladly makes its own⁷¹.

Aloysius Pieris says that the European model of inculturation, which often means the insertion of the Christian religion minus European culture into an Asian culture minus non-Christian religion, is not adequate for Asia⁷². In the Indian context, culture and religion are overlapping facets of one indivisible soteri-

67 International Theological Commission, ‘Faith and Inculturation’, in G. F. MCLEAN, R. MOLINA & T. READY (eds.), *Culture Human Rights and Peace in Central America*, New YORK, University Press of America, 1989, p. 303.

68 *Ibid.* p. 15.

69 J. SALDANA, *Mission Today. Themes and Issues*, Bangalore, Claretian Publications, 2006, p. 134. See also F. WILFRED, *On the Banks of Ganges. Doing Contextual Theology*, Delhi, ISPCK, 2005, pp. 83-112; J. VELAMKUNNEL, ‘Mission as Liberation’, in J. MATTAM & S. KIM (eds.), *Dimensions of Mission in India*, Bombay, St. Pauls, 1995, pp. 87-110; S. KAPPEN, ‘Towards an Indian Theology of Liberation’, in P. PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Theology of Liberation*, Bangalore, ITA/NBCLC, 1986, pp. 301-316.

70 ‘The statement of the ninth annual meeting of Indian Theological Association’, in PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Theology of Liberation*, pp. 8-23. Marcel Dumais, the New Testament scholar after analyzing the encounter of faith and culture as seen in the Acts of Apostles, presents five criteria for inculturation. Firstly, he says that though Christian faith is always expressed in a culture it is never tied to any culture and so it can be incarnated in all cultures. Secondly, he mentions that both culture and faith penetrate mutually. Thirdly, depending on the milieu and its expectations the approach to evangelization will be Christocentric or Theocentric. In addition, here the presentation of Christ can take various forms to unfold the old or new richness of the person of Jesus Christ. Fourthly, he goes on to say that to have a real inculturation the evangelizing discourse should pay heed to all the elements of a culture in their organic coherence and not just some of them. Lastly, he speaks about the three stages of evangelization. The first is to accept the cultures and religion by a willingness to listen to them, then make an effort to understand them, and finally give them a positive welcome. Secondly, it is to go beyond to the transformation of cultural and religious values and finally the proclamation should identify the weaknesses and narrow confines of the cultures and transform them. M. DUMAIS, ‘The Church of the Acts of the Apostles, A Model of Inculturation’, in A.A. ROEST CROLLIUS (ed.), *Cultural Change and Liberation in a Christian Perspective*, Rome, Gregorian University Press, 1987, p. 22-23.

71 *For all the People of Asia* (hereafter shortened as *FAPA*) I, in G. ROSALES & C.G. AREVALO (eds.), Quezon City, Claretian Publications, 1997, p. 14. All the important documents of the FABC issued between 1970 and 2006 were published in four volumes: *FAPA* I, II, III & IV.

72 PIERIS, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 52.

ology⁷³. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India calls for an openness to the world around and to "absorb all genuinely Indian values 'rejecting nothing that is true and holy' in the non-Christian religions of the land and promoting all good of any kind found anywhere in India"⁷⁴.

Caution is also needed concerning the worldview of the people. The Indian worldview is different from the Western worldview. As Aloysius Pieris says, the separation of religion from culture and religion from philosophy makes little sense in an Asian society⁷⁵. As part of the culture, the worldview of the people is to be understood and appreciated. It is not legitimate to require people to change their worldview in order to become Christians⁷⁶. "It is neither a part of missionaries' mandate nor usually a very realistic project to substitute a western scientific world view for the traditional one"⁷⁷. Therefore, our criteria should avoid substituting the Indian worldview with a Western worldview.

1.6.2. Process Criteria

Inculturation is an ongoing project and a process; thus, we need some criteria to give guidance in the efforts. The role of the community and the experts is to be given ample and adequate attention too. In the process, one should be open to the earlier efforts and learn lessons from it. Therefore, we shall now discuss those criteria that will give some guidelines on the process of inculturation.

1.6.2.1. The Role of Community

Aylward Shorter emphasizes the role of community in inculturation. He calls inculturation essentially a community process⁷⁸. It is the search of the respective community to be faithful to its own culture, while trying to transform that very same culture by the power of the Gospel⁷⁹. Inculturation has to be evolved by the community. "It is something that happens naturally as the by-product of an involvement with a people rather than the conscious target of a program of action"⁸⁰. The stress on community gives us the space for thinking of inculturation not as an introduction or insertion of certain elements by some outsiders, but as the result of the lived expression of a faithful community. True inculturation hap-

73 *Ibid.*

74 'Joint Pastoral Letter of Catholics Bishops Conference of India on the occasion of All India Seminar 1969', in *Church in India Today*, Delhi, CBCI, 1969, p. 505.

75 PIERIS, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 52.

76 *Ibid.*

77 TABER, 'The Limits of Indigenization in Theology', p. 59.

78 SHORTER, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, p. 51.

79 J. KAVUNKAL, 'Indian Perspectives in Mission and Missiology', in MATTAM & VALIAMANGALAM (eds.), *Emerging Indian Missiology*, p. 160.

80 PIERIS, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 38. The African bishops say that to become really local, the Church has to be "self-ministering, self-propagating and self-supporting". See SHORTER, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, p. 264.

pens when there is a community that lives faithfully by the Gospel and in the same costly identification with people in their real situations, as we see in the earthly ministry of Jesus⁸¹. According to Robert Schreiter, the Holy Spirit, working in and through the believing community, gives shape and expression to the Christian experience⁸².

The Indian theologian, Amaladoss, stresses the role of community in the formation of local Churches. He considers culture as the way of life of a people, their worldviews, and their system of values⁸³. When people hear the good news and turn to God in Jesus Christ, they express their response creatively in a new way of life, community structures, rituals and celebration, and spirituality. Thus, they contribute to the riches of their culture and to the Catholic communion. The community has a great role in providing criteria for authenticity and success in inculturation, because it is the life of the community that is in question⁸⁴. Amaladoss points out that the encounter between Gospel and culture takes place in the local community where the people are the real agents and subjects of the process⁸⁵. The efforts for inculturation cannot be pre-planned and controlled from above⁸⁶. John Paul II had also pointed out the importance of community in inculturation when he stated that the process of inculturation must involve the entire people of God⁸⁷. Chung Hyun-Kyung defends the right of people in all parts of the world and in all periods of time to explicate the meaning and message of the Gospel⁸⁸. In matters of culture, it is the community's sensibility that is decisive⁸⁹.

Criteria for Community Building

We are developing the criteria for inculturation in the area of community building. In addition, we have focused on the area of inculturation and have not specifically dealt with the aspect of community building. However, now we take a short plunge into the area of community building since we are dealing with the idea of community and our criteria for community building should also be in tune with the Indian/Asian understanding of community.

Sociologists now regard that being a community is primarily a cultural and symbolic reality and not a matter of structures and institutions. The famous sociologist, Anthony Cohen, says, "Community can no longer adequately be described in terms of institutions and components, for now we recognize it as sym-

81 L. NEWBIGIN, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, Grand Rapids, Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1989, p. 154.

82 SCHREITER, *Constructing Local Theologies*, p. 16.

83 M. AMALADOSS, 'Challenges of Mission in the 21st Century', in *Theology Digest* 47, 2000, 1, p. 18.

84 SHORTER, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, p. 266.

85 M. AMALADOSS, *Beyond Inculturation. Can the Many be One?*, Delhi, Vidyajyoti Education & Welfare Society/ISPCK, 1998, p. 27. See also PINTO 'Mission in the North Indian Context' p. 143.

86 P.M. COLLINS, *Context, Culture and Worship. The Quest for Indian-ness*, Delhi, ISPCK, 2006, p. 280.

87 J. PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 21, 1999.

88 W. ARIARAJAH, *Gospel and Culture. An Ongoing Discussion within the Ecumenical Movement*, Geneva, WCC Publications, 1994, p. x.

89 T. MENAMPARAMPIL, 'Conversion. The Cultural Dimension', in *Mission Today* 10, 2008, 1, p. 26.

bol to which its various adherents impute their own meanings”⁹⁰. Gusfield distinguished between two major uses for the term community. The first is the territorial idea where community is identified with its locality – the area, village, town, etc.⁹¹. The second is the relational understanding that is based on the human relationship, without reference to the locality⁹². The second meaning has come to take precedence over the former in the present times. In our case, also it is relevant since in India the idea of community is not limited to locality.

In Asia, community is conceived and lived in a different way, from other places. “The boundaries are not rigidly marked, structures not rigorously fixed and conditions of belonging not strictly laid down”⁹³. The demarcations between communities are not defined but it is present among the populace in fluidity. This fluidity enables them for multiple belonging. On the one hand, they share a cultural unity but, on the other hand, they belong to diverse religious groups, races, sects, and communities⁹⁴. “In the Asian way of being community, the boundaries are so fluid that one could be in the Jesus community without ceasing to be a participant in other religious experiences and expressions of community and vice versa”⁹⁵. For example among the Hindu brethren, the *mārgs* or paths like *bhakti* (way of devotion), *jñān* (way of knowledge) and *karm* (way of involvement and action) characterize a person’s religious leanings rather than his or her institutional membership in a religion⁹⁶. Thus, our criteria for community building should be formulated in such a way that it fits the Asian or Indian understanding of the community.

1.6.2.2. The Role of Experts

Emphasis on community does not leave out completely the role of experts and missionaries in inculturation. Experts are needed to ensure the truly Christian character of the new creation which inculturation brings into existence. Shorter gives the experts and missionaries the role of assisting the community in making the necessary discernment and the indispensable critique of its own culture and also to promote the discovery of the seeds of the Word⁹⁷. In the process of incul-

90 A.P. COHEN, *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, Chichester, Ellis Horwood, 1985, p. 74.

91 Even in this case, to the ordinary rural folk in India the village is not just a collection of houses, lanes, and fields, but a social reality. See D.G. MANDELBAUM, *Society in India. Change and Continuity* Vol. 2, California, University of California Press, 1970, p. 327.

92 J. GUSFIELD, *Community a Critical Response*, New York, Harper Colophon, 1975, p. xvi. For the details about community and its meaning see also E. WENGER, *Communities of Practice. Learning, Meaning and Identity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 43-84.

93 F. WILFRED, ‘Emerging Trends Challenge the Churches of Asia’, p. 16.

94 N. JAYAPALAN, *Indian Society and Social Institutions*, New Delhi, Atlantic Publishers and Distributions, 2001, p. 1.

95 WILFRED, ‘Emerging Trends Challenge the Churches of Asia’, p. 16.

96 *Ibid.*

97 SHORTER, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, p. 266.

turation, the missionaries or experts take the first step and set in motion the process⁹⁸. They also stir, interpret, and refine the creativity of the community.

However, in the case of faith related matters, the role of experts from outside the community is limited while the believing community provides the thermometer⁹⁹. Shorter says that when inculturation is clerically inspired and clerically controlled it is too cerebral, too remote from the real life of the community¹⁰⁰. Therefore, it should not be left to a few experts who then have the task of “selling” it to the people¹⁰¹. Inculturation is the result of an involvement and interaction with a people and not a target-oriented programme managed and controlled by some outsiders¹⁰². Although it is true, that lifelong membership in a local community does not guarantee insight¹⁰³. All the same, when inculturation becomes a lived and popular reality it is unstoppable and if there is an official disapproval, then it runs the risk of provoking schisms and secessions¹⁰⁴.

The balance between experts and community shall be maintained in the efforts of inculturation. There is a sense in which all inculturation is “inculturation from below”. However, it should not take place in opposition to the experts and representatives of the Church, but in collaboration with them¹⁰⁵. What is required is an ongoing dialogue between the community and the experts. The experts should give assistance to the community by translating the common talk of non-theological people into expert-language so that the questions of the common people are not done away with too soon.

1.6.2.3. Lessons from Earlier Efforts

In India, many efforts were undertaken for the inculturation of the Church. There were individual efforts and efforts by the Indian Church as a body guided by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India. Similarly, the *āśram* movement also was aimed at inculturation. However, all these efforts ended up without achieving the desired goals. Therefore, it is important to study those efforts, find out the reasons for their failures, and learn lessons for the future to avoid similar failings. Hence, in our criteria we should try to avoid the same pitfalls and correct them.

1.6.3. *The Role and Relation between Universal and Other Particular Churches*

98 MENAMPARAMPIL, ‘Conversion. The Cultural Dimension’, p. 25.

99 *Ibid.* p. 27.

100 SHORTER, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, p. 266.

101 *Ibid.* p. 254.

102 PIERIS, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, p. 38

103 SCHREITER, *Constructing Local Theologies*, p. 20. In African Theology, the stress on community has great significance. Apart from community, African people are not fully persons. See L. MAGESA, *Anatomy of Inculturation. Transforming the Church in Africa*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 2004, pp. 10-17.

104 A. SHORTER, ‘Inculturation the Premise of Universality’, in CORNILLE & NECKEBROUCK (eds.) *A Universal Faith?*, p. 18.

105 *Ibid.*

The catholicity of the Church requires that each local Church be related to the universal Church and to the other local Churches¹⁰⁶. Inculturation should not result in a closed system where it will not be open to other traditions and newer interpretations. The local Church is the local expression of the same universal Church. It should be open to the *sensus fidelium* of the external wider community. All the Churches have something to offer and something to receive¹⁰⁷. This mutual giving and receiving is a role expected of all Churches and every local Church has to be open to other Churches¹⁰⁸. Therefore, any local Church shall be willing to stand under the judgment of other Churches in the matter of its Christian performance¹⁰⁹. However, Asian theologians, for example, are trying to do theology in a specifically Asian way and, with respect to Asian realities, it is inappropriate to assess them by criteria derived from a different context¹¹⁰.

1.6.4. A Certain Relativization of Church in Relation to the Kingdom of God

The idea of the Kingdom of God as central in the discussion of mission and inculturation has emerged in India in the writing of several theologians¹¹¹. They see Church as the community sent into the world to be the symbol and the servant of the Kingdom of God¹¹². It is also seen as the leaven placed in the world to facilitate the transformation of everything into the Kingdom¹¹³. The Church exists for sake of the reign of God¹¹⁴. It is seen as a sacrament, sign, and instrument through which Christ acts for the realization of the Kingdom of God. Continuing

106 The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, 13.

107 BÜHLMANN, *The Church of the Future*, p. 177.

108 M. AMALADOSS, 'The Challenges of Mission Today', in JENKINSON & O'SULLIVAN (eds.), *Trends in Mission*, p. 387.

109 SCHREITER, *Constructing Local Theologies*, p. 120. Schreiter, presents five criteria for Christian identity:

1. The cohesiveness of Christian performance.
2. The worshiping context and Christian performance.
3. The praxis of the community and Christian performance.
4. The judgment of other Churches and Christian performance.
5. The challenge to other Churches and Christian performance.

All these five points are included in our criteria. The first two become part of faithfulness to Gospel and culture the third is role of community while the last two are included in the role of other Churches. See SCHREITER, *Constructing Local Theologies*, pp. 117-121.

110 K. KIM, 'Missiology as Global Conversation of Contextual Theologies' in *Mission Studies* 21, 2004, p. 47.

111 JOSEPH, 'Mission as Inculturation', p. 166. See also K. PATHIL, *Theology of the Church. New Horizons*, Bangalore, Dharmaram Publications, 2006, pp. 35-38. For the early Christians the Kingdom of God was indissolubly bound up with the person of Jesus Christ. For details see R.N. FLEW, *The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology*, London, Oxford University Press, 1934, pp. 4-40.

112 J. MONIZ, *Liberated Society. Gandhian and Christian Vision Comparative Study*, Roma, Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1996, p. 242.

113 *Ibid.* See also the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, 5.

114 M. AMALADOSS, 'The Challenges of Mission Today', in W. JENKINSON & H. O'SULLIVAN (eds.), *Trends in Mission. Towards the Third Millennium*, New York, Orbis Books, 1991, p. 365.

the mission of Jesus Christ the Church has to advance His mission of love and service to the extent of dying for others¹¹⁵. Many Indian theologians stress the need for focusing on the Kingdom of God and not on Church¹¹⁶. Amaladosh says that the Indian Church should not focus on itself but on the Kingdom. It should see conversion primarily not as becoming its members, but as turning to God. It should not shy away from welcoming in its fellowship people who feel called to become disciples of Jesus, since it has its mission of being the symbol and servant of the Kingdom¹¹⁷. The Church exists for the sake of the kingdom and presents itself as a model of the kingdom. “The kingdom is the aim and ultimate goal for which the Church strives, and which gives meaning to all her tasks”¹¹⁸. It is within the context and dynamics of the Kingdom of God that the fellowship with members of different religions and faith is seen¹¹⁹. Moreover, the mission of the Church is understood as “participation in the divine mission of building the Kingdom of God beyond the visible limits of the institutional church”¹²⁰.

115 J. KAVUNKAL, ‘Mission and Raising Ecclesial Communities’, in MATTAM & KIM, *Dimensions of Mission in India*, p. 61.

116 The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium* 9. See also W. ARIARAJAH, *Hindus and Christians. A Century of Protestant Ecumenical Thought*, Grand Rapids, Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991, p. 112.

117 M. AMALADOSS ‘The Multi Religious Experience and Indian Theology’, in V. MACHADO (ed.), *Society and Church. Challenges to Theologizing in India Today*, Bangalore, Dharmaram Publications, 2004, p. 175.

118 G.M. FLOREZ, *An Appeal to the Church. The Mission of the Church in Asia*, Anand, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1986, p. 97. See also R.P. MCBRIEN, *Church, the Continuing Quest*, New York, Newman Press, 1970, p. 38.

119 WILFRED, *On the Banks of Ganges*, p. 65.

120 J.P. PINTO, ‘Mission in the North Indian Context’, in J. MATTAM & J. VALIAMANGALAM (eds.), *Emerging Indian Missiology. Context and Concept*, Delhi, FOIM/ISPCK, 2006, p. 132. See also W. BÜHLMANN, *The Church of the Future. A Model for the Year 2001*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1981, p. 177.

Chapter 2

Inculturation of the Church in India

2.0. Introduction

The Catholic Church in India took seriously the call of the Second Vatican Council for inculturation by making a concerted effort towards its achievement. This chapter makes a short survey of the efforts achieved by some prominent individuals and the Indian Catholic Church as a body. In order to understand the necessity of inculturation in India, it is essential that we take a bird's eye view of how Christians in general are perceived in India by their Hindu neighbours. Therefore, after presenting the two-stage arrival of Christianity in India, we shall expose how Christians are seen in India as manifested in the writings of some Hindu intellectuals and Christian theologians. This will be followed by a short presentation of the desire for an Indian Church as observed in the writings of theologians and church documents. It will be followed by clarifying the concepts of Church and inculturation and by presenting the theological basis for inculturation. Thereafter, we shall make a survey of the individual efforts and the collective efforts for inculturation undertaken under the guidance of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India. As part of inculturation, the *āśram* movement emerged as an important agent. Therefore, we will make a detailed survey of the Catholic *āśram* movement. It will be followed by an evaluation of the *āśram* movement and the resultant dissatisfaction about the whole endeavour. At the same time, we shall see the persistent desire for a new way of being church in India. This context of the failures of attempted inculturation-models and the desire for a suitable model, which will enable Christians to find themselves both as Indians and Christians at the same time, becomes the point of departure for our research into the *Khrist Bhakta* movement.

2.1. Church in India: Origins and How it was Spread

The arrival of Christianity to India is broadly divided into two stages. The first stage is traced back to the first century¹²¹. The Indian Christian tradition is summarized in the words of Indian Church historian, Mundadan: "St. Thomas, one of the 12 apostles of our Lord, came direct from the Near-east and landed in

121 No recorded material concerning the beginning of Christianity in India in the first century is available, but the very strong tradition and the subsequent materials point to the existence of Christianity from the first century. For the details of the Thomas tradition see J. CHEERAN, *The Indian Orthodox Church of St. Thomas. AD 52-2009*, Kottayam, K.V. Mammen Kottackal Publishers, 2009, pp. 26-39.

Crangannore about 52 AD; he converted high caste Hindu families in Crangannor, Palayur, Quilon etc., consecrated priests from some of these families, built some seven churches, erected crosses; then passed over to the eastern coast and suffered martyrdom there; his tomb is in Mylapore on the east¹²². Paul Pallath, after a detailed study and analysis of several sources concludes that the accessibility of South India in the first century, the presence of Jewish colonies, local literary and art forms, the testimony of the fathers of the Church, the tomb of the Apostle (Thomas) at Mylapore, the apocryptical writings, the liturgical tradition, and, above all, the presence of the Christian community in the name of the apostle from the very first century itself, concur and converge on the essential historical core of the mission, martyrdom, and burial of the Apostle Thomas in India¹²³. When Panthenus of Alexandria reached India in the year AD 180, he found a church already in existence¹²⁴. Although some scholars question the reliability of these sources, Leslie Brown thinks that the proof of very considerable commercial contact between the western world and the Malabar Coast in the first century, and the probable presence of Jewish colonies at the same time, incline the balance of belief that the truth of the tradition is a reasonable probability¹²⁵. There was no physical reason why Christian traders or the Apostle himself could not have come to Malabar in the first century¹²⁶.

This Kerala Christian community comprises also several ancient Aramaic Christian settlements. In AD 345 a small group of K'nanaïm (pronounced knanaya) merchants under the leadership of Thomas also travelled to Kerala and settled there. Their descendants are an endogamous group maintaining their separate identity and today are known as *Knānāyā Nasrānis*. Besides this group, the

122 A.M. MUNDADAN, *Traditions of St. Thomas Christians*, Bangalore, Dharmaram Publications, 1970, p. 5. Some scholars doubt the Thomas tradition especially the date AD 52. The date remains contested, but the testimonies of Eusebius and St. Jerome about the mission of Pantaenus, the testimonies of Fathers of the Church like St. Clement of Alexandria, Origen, St. Ephrem, St. Gregory of Nazianze, St. Amrose, and St. Isidore of Seville affirm the tradition. See also B. VADAKKEKARA, *Origin of Christianity in India. A Historiographical Critique*, Delhi, Media House, 2007; G. MENACHERY & W. CHAKKALAKKAL, *Kodungalur. The Cradle of Christianity in India*, Kodungalur, Mar Thoma Pontifical Shrine, 2000, pp. 27-47; P.J. PODIPARA, *The Thomas Christians*, London, Darton, Longman & Todd/Bombay, St. Paul Publications, 1970, pp. 15-35. In any case, most of the scholars agree on the existence of the Christian faith in India by the close of the second century. See J.W. KAYE, *Christianity in India. An Historical Narrative*, London, Smith, Elder & Co., 1859, pp. 4-5.

123 P. PALLATH, *The Catholic Church in India*, Roma, Mar Thoma Yogam, 2003, pp. 6-7. What is in parenthesis is added by the present researcher.

124 J.W. PICKETT, *Christ's Way to India's Heart*, London, The United Society for Christian Literature, 1938, p. 18. See also G. SMITH, *The Conversion of India. From Pantaenus to the Present Time*, Piscataway, NJ, Geogias Press, 2004, p. 14. About the year 354 the Roman emperor Constantius sent Theophilus the Indian to the countries in the east. He visited his native Maldives and then went to Malabar where he had reformed many things which he thought were not being done correctly: e.g., the Gospel (at the Eucharist) was heard in a sitting posture. This is an evidence of an organized church with a ministry of celebrating the Eucharist, which was old enough to have developed certain indigenous peculiarities, such as sitting for the Gospel. See C.B. FIRTH, *An Introduction to Indian Church History*, Madras, The Christian Literature Society, 1961 revised ed., p. 21.

125 L. BROWN, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas. An Account of the Ancient Syrian Church of Malabar*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982, p. 59.

126 *Ibid.* p. 63.

ancient Church of Kerala includes in its history a number of different traditions. These Christians are known to have had not much contact with Western Christianity. In the course of time, they encountered the Persian Church and were ruled over by bishops from Persia¹²⁷.

During the early centuries, the St. Thomas Christians were more inculturated than the present times. As Kuncheria Pathil notes, "In their cultural life, the St. Thomas Christians were not different from their Hindu counterparts. For them acceptance of Christian faith did not mean abandoning the socio-cultural systems and practices of their Hindu relatives and friends"¹²⁸. These Christians were well accepted and even respected. They were never persecuted but rather were given a high place in society¹²⁹. "Adopting themselves to the caste-ridden Hindu social set-up and Christianizing the ancient Hindu culture in many aspects they became the sons of the soil in the fullest sense"¹³⁰.

It is true that they were fully inculturated but still maintained an ecclesial life that was rather imported. Though these communities were socially and culturally quite at home in India, less inculturation took place in their ecclesial life. Somehow, the St. Thomas Christians balanced their cultural and ecclesial life. "The Indian Christians always appeared to have made a clear and conscious distinction between that official worship and all other practices"¹³¹. However, we do not find any conflict between their spiritual life and cultural life. Even the Hindu scholars like Chaturvedi Badrinath agree that the Christians of Kerala did not ever think that there was, in principle, any conflict between the spiritual environment in which they had their roots and their faith in Jesus as saviour¹³².

It is interesting to note that even at the very outset of the Christian presence in India, a kind of tension or an apprehension of uneasiness between what is Indian (cultural life) and what is foreign (ecclesial life) is reflected. Even so, the Christians made a synthesis of these two elements in their lives and became culturally one with the Indian society.

The second stage in Christianity's arrival in India was the introduction of Latin Christianity with the arrival of European missionaries in the end of the 15th century, even though sporadic visits by some western missionaries can be traced back

127 F. THONIPPARA, 'St. Thomas Christians. The First Indigenous Church of India', in R.E. HEDLUND (ed.), *Christianity is Indian. The Emergence of An Indigenous Community*, Delhi, ISPCK, 2000, p. 62. At the council of Nicaea at the close of fourth century, one of the Prelates named Johanna subscribed his name as 'Metropolitan of Persia and the Great India'. See J.W. KAYE, *Christianity in India*, p. 14.

128 K. PATHIL, *Trends in Indian Theology*, Bangalore, Asian Trading Corporation, 2005, p. 24.

129 C. BADRINATH, *Finding Jesus in Dharma. Christianity in India*, Delhi, ISPCK, 2004, p. 11. See also R.H. LESSER, *Why I am Here. A Missionary Speaks*, Ananad, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1988, p. 177.

130 J. ARTHEYIL, *The Spiritual Heritage of the St. Thomas Christians*, Bangalore, Dharmaram Publications, 2001, p. 42.

131 M.D. STRINGER, *A Sociological History of the Christian Worship*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 156.

132 BADRINATH, *Finding Jesus in Dharma*, p. 3.

to the 13th century¹³³. The Portuguese missionaries came to India at the close of the 15th century, more precisely, on the 16th of November 1497 when Vasco da Gama, a Portuguese merchant, landed in Goa, on the west coast of India¹³⁴. With the arrival of the Portuguese missionaries, we have, on the one hand, the Latinization of the already existing Christian community of Kerala¹³⁵, and, on the other hand, the expansion of Christianity to North India.

The Portuguese king conquered Goa in 1505. Pope Alexander VI handed over the *padroado* (Portuguese patronage) power to the Portuguese king in 1493, which decreed that the apostolic commissioner for the newly discovered lands be appointed by the Portuguese king independent of other ecclesiastical jurisdictions¹³⁶.

For the Portuguese, “the western form of Christianity which was the Roman form of Christianity was the perfect one, not only in matters of faith and morals but in everything, they thought that distinguished a Christian from a non-Christian”¹³⁷. The missionaries saw every member of another religion as pagan and any association with them as against the faith in Christ. “Any compromise with Hindu life or religion was avoided, e.g. the eating of beef was held to be necessary as it would put the convert altogether out of the pale of Hinduism”¹³⁸. The Portuguese missionaries did not understand the customs and practices of the St. Thomas Christians. Christians and Hindus living together and sharing the same customs was a shock to them. They were scandalised at the appearance of the Syrian houses of worship, which they declared to be heathen temples scarcely disguised¹³⁹. Most of the European missionaries came from a background that was mono-cultural, whereas the Christians in India had been living in a multi-cultural situation in harmony with the members of other religions, in spite of the religious differences. The Portuguese missionaries considered this to indicate a lack of proper reverence to Christ and Christian traditions¹⁴⁰. Hence, the Portuguese “sometimes rudely, began to press the Indian Christian communities to conform to the western Catholic customs”¹⁴¹. Hence, in this situation the ideal thing for the Portuguese was to Latinize the community to purge it from all

133 See for details, G.M. MORAES, *A History of Christianity in India. From Early Times to Francis Xavier*, Bombay, Manaktalas, 1964, pp. 80-105. See also PALLATH, *The Catholic Church in India*, p. 37.

134 Vasco de Gama landed in Calicut, Kerala, in May 1498 before proceeding to Goa. See L. BROWN, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982, p. 12.

135 R. BOYD, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, Madras. The Christian Literature Society, 1969, pp. 7-8. See also E. SHIMUN XXXIII, *The Church of the East*, Trichur, T. Narsai Press, 1961, p. 37.

136 L. CORETH, ‘East-West Crossing. Cultural Exchange and the Jesuit Mission in China’, in J. CLARKE, L. CORETH and C.M. CAIN (eds.), *Binding Friendship. Ricci, China and Jesuit Cultural Learning*, Boston, The Jesuit Institute of Boston College, 2011, p. 20.

137 A.M. MUNDADAN, *St. Thomas Christians 1498-1552*, Bangalore, Dharmaram College, 1967, p. 157.

138 K.M. PANIKKAR, *Asia and Western Dominance. A Survey of the Vasco da Gama Epoch of Asian History 1498-1945*, London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1959, p. 281.

139 KAYE, *Christianity in India*, p. 24.

140 S.H. MOFFETT, *A History of Christianity in Asia. Vol II, 1500 to 1900*, New York, Orbis Books, 2005, p. 6.

141 MOFFETT, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, p. 6.

error and superstitions¹⁴². The Latinizing of the 16th century Indian Church reached its peak in 1599 at the Synod of Diamper¹⁴³. As a result the “indigenous and quasi-autonomous Church was transformed into a mere administrative unit of the western ecclesiastical system”¹⁴⁴.

In the 16th century, the Portuguese *padroado* and the Roman Congregation of the Propaganda Fide played important roles in establishing the Latin Church in India¹⁴⁵. Several religious orders such as the Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians, Carmelites, Jesuits, and the Theatines were active in the Indian mission. The Portuguese colonial government in Goa supported the mission in India with incentives for baptised Christians. They made several plans and conducted high-level consultations for the effective Christianization of Goa¹⁴⁶. The Jesuits, led by Saint Francis Xavier, opened their headquarters in Goa in 1542¹⁴⁷. Francis Xavier gave a new vigour to the missions under the Portuguese *padroado*. He made mass conversions in India and presented Christianity as the religion of the Europeans¹⁴⁸. There were many conversions in Mangalore, Bombay, Gujarat, and certain pockets in Central and North India¹⁴⁹.

After the decline of Portuguese power in 1660, the interest in the Catholic mission was reduced. From 1600 onwards, traders from other countries came to the East and made contact with India. People from England, Holland, and Denmark, who were Protestants and sometimes even hostile to the Catholic Church, now gained dominance in India¹⁵⁰. Moreover, the Dutch and the British who came after the Portuguese were more interested in trade than mission.

142 A.M. MUNDADAN, *History of Christianity in India Vol. I. From the Beginning up to the Middle of the Sixteenth Century*, Bangalore, Theological Publications in India, 1984, p. 484.

143 K. PATHIL, *Ecumenism. Unity in Diversity*, Bangalore, Dharmaram Publications, 2006, p. 182. See also BOYD, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, pp. 7-8.

144 J. KAVUNKAL, ‘Culture and Mission. Colonialistic Times and Beyond’, in J. MATTAM & K.C. MARAK (eds.), *Missiological Approaches in India*, Bombay, St. Pauls Publications, 1999, p. 32.

145 *Ibid.* p. 181.

146 X. KOODAPUZHA, *Christianity in India*, Kottayam, Oriental Institute of Religious Studies in India/ Department of Publication of Paurastya Vidyapitham, 1998, p. 172.

147 C.J. COSTA, ‘Catholic Mission in the Archdiocese of Goa and Daman’, in A. KANJAMALA (ed.), *Integral Mission Dynamics. An Interdisciplinary Study of the Catholic Church in India*, New Delhi, Intercultural Publications, 1995, p. 128.

148 KOODAPUZHA, *Christianity in India*, p. 184. The mode of conversion applied by Francis Xavier was to leave one copy of the *Christian Instruction* in each village, and assemble the villagers on festival days and make them chant the rudiments of Christian faith and then baptise them. Although he could not master any of the Indian languages, he often worked even without the service of a translator. See the details in SMITH, *The Conversion of India*, pp. 51-65.

149 At the invitation of the Mughal emperor Akbar, three Jesuits reached Agra in 1580. Some Mughal emperors were favourable to the Christians and so the Jesuits opened mission stations at Jaipur, Delhi, Mathura, Ujjain and Banaras. For details, see D. D’BOUZA, *Growth and Activities of Catholic Church in North India 1757-1858. A Historical Study*, Lucknow, Vitus Prabhudas, 1982, pp. 15-20. The conversion of Begum Yohanna Samru of Agra in 1781 and her role in the Sardhana mission near Meerut is prominent. For details, see R.B. SHARMA *Christian Missions in North India*, Delhi, Mittal Publications, 1988, pp. 57-63.

150 J.H. GENSE, *The Church at the Gateway of India 1720-1960*, Bombay, St. Xavier’s College, 1960, p. 18. See also F.A. PLANTNER, *The Catholic Church in India. Yesterday and Today*, Allahabad, St. Paul Publications, 1964, pp. 23-25.

During the early 18th century, the Protestant missionaries also appeared in Tamil Nadu, India. Pope Gregory XVI, in 1831, gave a new impetus to the missionary movement in India. "His policy was to set up apostolic vicariates in non-Portuguese territories as a framework within which missionaries could come and work; for it was clear that Portugal could not extend its responsibilities"¹⁵¹. The Pope established several vicariates in India. This was also the time when, in Europe, a lot of emphasis was given to missions and several fresh missionaries came into India from Europe. The Jesuits from France, Italy, England, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Ireland arrived and spread the missions in North India¹⁵². During this period, sometimes called the period of the modern missionary movement, many women's orders also came to work in India. Among them, the efforts of Fr. Constant Lievens in Chotta Nagpur are outstanding. Thousands of tribals joined the Catholic Church during his missionary activities (1885-1892). In 1927 when the diocese of Ranchi was established in that area, the community numbered 190,000¹⁵³.

The Protestant missionaries began the mission work in North East India. The first Catholic missionaries to arrive in this region were the German Salvadorians in 1890¹⁵⁴. When the German missionaries were forced out of the region by the British administration in 1915, the Catholics numbered only 5,176. Thereafter, the area was entrusted to the Salesians. The independence of India from the British government in 1947 was a boon to the Roman Catholic Church in North East India. New areas like Manipur, Nagaland, and Mizoram became the centres of missionary activity¹⁵⁵. The North East area is now considered a full-fledged ecclesiastical area and not a mission area. The number of Catholics in 1981 was 2,886,308.

At the beginning of the second-stage arrival of Christianity, there was a tension between what is "Indian" and what is "received". Here, the foreign element of Christianity is strongly seen. At the same time there were people who opted to live a life which they thought was culturally closer to India. Also, in the 18th century, the numbers of Christians were on the increase, particularly in South India wherever the missionaries had adopted a *saṃnyāsī* style of life¹⁵⁶.

In the second half of the 19th century, we find a greater inclination among the converts to seek Indian ways of expressing their Christian devotion, as if some people were finding the prevailing Westernism unsatisfying. It is also worth noting that at a time when the collective was predominant in the society, some individuals operated by swimming against the current. There is a glimpse of Christi-

151 FIRTH, *An Introduction to Indian Church History*, p. 210.

152 *Ibid.* pp. 213-217.

153 *Ibid.* p. 218.

154 G. KOTTUPPALLIL, 'Catholic Mission in North East India', in KANJAMALA (ed.), *Integral Mission Dynamics*, pp. 288-289.

155 *Ibid.* pp. 288-289.

156 E.R. HAMBYE, *History of Christianity in India, Vol. III*, Bangalore, The Church History Association of India, 1997, p. 482.

anity showing interest in the Indian culture¹⁵⁷. Krishnarao Sangle of Ahmednagar composed (Christian) Marathi lyrics in Indian metre and set them to Indian *rāgās*. In a similar fashion in Tamil Nadu, Krishna Pillai published two Christian poetical works in Tamil. There were also similar works in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. Narayan Vaman Tilak wrote a great deal on Christian devotions. The life of Christ was written as an epic called *Christāyana*, the first part of which was published in 1921 in Marathi. There were also some individuals who moved away from the institutional churches and lived like *saṃnyāsīs*. Tilak himself was one of these. Similarly, B.C. Sircar, a Bengali Christian started to practice *yoga*¹⁵⁸ and set up a shrine at Puri - a sacred place of Hinduism. *Sādhu* Sundar Singh donned an ochre robe and lived like a wandering *saṃnyāsi*¹⁵⁹.

By the end of the 20th century, the Catholic Church in India consisted of about 13,424,000 Catholics divided into 126 dioceses. This accounts for 1.8% of the total population of India, spread all over India: 25% in Kerala; 21% in Tamil Nadu; 10% in the Bombay-Pune-Goa-Magalore region; 6% in the North East; 9% in Chotanagpur, with the remaining 29% in the other parts of the country¹⁶⁰.

2.1.2. Contemporary Perceptions

India is a vast country with a population exceeding 1 billion and comprised of several cultures, races, languages, castes, etc. Several gurus and religious movements arise and flourish in this vast land. The people in general are religiously-minded and give an honoured place to the religious leaders. It is a home for several religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Parsism, Islam, and Christianity.

According to the census data (2001) of the Government of India, the religious composition and their percentage of the people of India are as follows:

Religious Composition	Population	%
Hindus		
Muslims	827,578,868	80.5
Christians	138,188,240	13.4
Sikhs	24,080,016	2.3
Buddhists	19,215,730	1.9
Jains	7,955,207	0.8
Other Religions	4,225,053	0.4
Religion not stated	6,639,626	0.6
	727,588	0.1

157 PANIKKAR, *Asia and Western Dominance*, p. 295.

158 The original Sanskrit term is *yōg* which means union/concentration. However, in generic usage it has become *yoga*. Hence we shall use the generic term *yoga* in our discussions.

159 BOYD, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, p. 93.

160 P. MEKKUNNEL, 'The Prophetic Mission of the Indian Church', in K. KUNNUMPURAM, E. D'LIMA, & J. PARAPPILLY (eds.), *The Church in India in Search of a New Identity*, Bangalore, NBCLC, 1997, p. 246.

Total

1,028,610,328

100.00¹⁶¹

The tiny Christian minority runs thousands of educational institutions and hospitals spread all over India and has contributed significantly in the development of the nation¹⁶². However, the Hindu majority does not always see them positively. We now look at how the Christians are perceived by the Hindus in general followed by the self-perception of the Christian theologians.

2.1.2.1. The Perceptions toward Christians by the Hindu Intellectuals

Christianity in India is considered a Western religion and many people oppose its propagation in India on several grounds and in different degrees. The average Indian does not respect the Christian religion and considers all Christians as outsiders. This opposition has been more widespread and militant in the recent past with more physical attacks on Christian institutions, such as the burning down of churches, and even the killing of some Christians. Since 1980, militant Hinduism has been on the rise, which consists of fighting both politically and religiously for *Hindutvā*, the ideal of an all-powerful Hinduism as the one religion of India¹⁶³. The traditional Christianity of Kerala is viewed, by these militants, as an exception¹⁶⁴. However, concerning the Churches in North India, a majority of the Hindu intellectuals and especially some leaders and most of the followers of *Rāṣṭrīyā Swayamsēvak Saṅgh* (RSS)¹⁶⁵ and its affiliated groups have the opinion that the Church is Western and foreign. They vehemently oppose any attempt or activity by the Christian missionaries even if it is meant for dialogue or inculturation. The writings of those intellectuals help us understand the trend of their oppositions. However, some appreciate Christianity and the contributions of the Church to the society. First, under the heading “strong perception,” we shall see the

161 Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, (2001) available at http://www.censusindia.gov.in/Census_Data_2001/India_at_glance/religion.aspx, accessed on 13.11.2009. The government has not published the religion wise data in the 2011 census.

162 E. ASHIRVATHAM, *Christianity in the Indian Crucible*, Calcutta, YMCA Publishing House, 1957, pp. 235-255.

163 J.P. SCHOUTEN, *Jesus as Guru. The Image of Christ among Hindus and Christians in India*, Amsterdam/ New York, Rodopi, 2008, pp. 260-261.

164 R. MADHAV, ‘Dismantle the Evangelical Establishment’, in *Organiser*, 60, 2008, 17, p.10.

165 RSS is the umbrella organization which champions the ideology of *Hindutvā* (Hinduness). Over the past 50 years, the RSS has emerged as an increasingly powerful force in India and has become the head of what is now known as the *Saṅgh Parivār*, or family of Hindu nationalist organizations, and is spread across all sectors of Hindu society. These organizations include the *Akhil Bhārtīyā Vidyārthī Pariṣad* – the all India students organization, the *Bhārtīyā Mazdūr Saṅgh* (BMS), the Indian workers association, the largest trade union in the country, the *Bhārtīyā Janātā Party* (BJP), the political party which is the political arm of the RSS, the *Viśvā Hindu Pariṣad* (VHP), International Hindu Organization, and its offshoot the *Bajrang Dal*, which represent the more explicitly religious wing, and *Svadēśī Jāgaraṇ Mañc*, founded to protect Indian economic self-reliance from the threat of foreign capital, and many other similar associations sharing the similar ideology.

views of those who oppose Christianity. Thereafter, under the heading “mild perception,” we shall make an overview of those views, which appreciate Christianity.

Strong Perception

First of all, some of the intellectuals oppose Christianity on the basis of protecting Indian culture. This group sees Christianity in India not just as a religion but also as a culture. Consequently, conversion to Christianity means not just the acceptance of Christ as the saviour, but also adoption of the Western way of life. In India, Hindu religion and Hindu culture are almost inseparable. *Svāmī* Dayananda Saraswati says that one cannot separate culture from religion because in India religion and culture are intertwined so much that the religion has entered the fabric of the culture. Culture cannot be retained if the religion is destroyed¹⁶⁶. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the Father of the (Indian) nation shares the same view.

About the same time, I heard of a well-known Hindu having been converted to Christianity. It was the talk of the town that when he was baptised, he had to eat beef and drink liquor, that he also had to change his clothes, and that henceforth he began to go about in European costume including a hat... I also heard that the new convert had already begun abusing the religion of his ancestors, their customs and their country. All these things created in me a dislike for Christianity¹⁶⁷.

They do not oppose the conversion of heart to Jesus Christ or conversion from one faith to another. Nevertheless, they oppose the change of community and culture. They see Christian conversion as fundamentally subversive in content and as a silent and deliberate move to break up Indian culture¹⁶⁸.

Church is also seen as completely alien and to be rejected in totality. They see the Christian Churches as agents that alienate people from their culture and their commitment to India. M.V. Kamath, a regular columnist in *Organiser*, the mouthpiece of RSS, says that the Church is imposing an alien cultural value on Indian Christians¹⁶⁹. He says that in Hinduism, the general norm of worship is that the individual or family worships with simple forms and rites, commonly in

166 D. SARASWATI, *Conversion is Violence 10*. A booklet which contains excerpts of the key note address delivered by Dayananda Saraswati in a seminar on “Violence to Hindu Heritage” organized by the Citizen’s Committee for *Dharm Rakṣaṇ Sammelan*, Chennai on 17th July 1999. Saraswati is a Hindu teacher and founder of the *Arṣ Vidyā Āśram* in Rishikesh (U.P, India) and the *Arṣ Vidyā Gurukulam* in Coimbatore (T.N, India).

167 M.K. GANDHI, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth. An Autobiography*, transl., M. DESAI, Ahmabad, Navjeevan Publications House, 2001, pp. 28-29.

168 K. N. SUBRAMANYAM, *Catholic Community in India*, Madras, Macmillan, 1970, p.xii.

169 M.V. KAMATH, ‘What is this All about Saving Souls?’, in *Organiser* 50, 2008, 16, p. 9.

the home itself, without the intervention of a priest¹⁷⁰. The religious ceremonies and expressions of Christianity are considered not spiritual according to the Indian mind set. They say that the gorgeous ceremonies, the dependence on the priesthood, the aggressive proselytizing spirit, and the obeisance the Church pays to the State are not Indian¹⁷¹.

Moreover, Christianity is considered not only merely an alien and Western institution but a westernising institution. There is widespread objection to Christianity from the Hindus on the ground that converts become westernized and denationalized, abandon the social and cultural traditions of India, and adopt European manners and customs¹⁷². M.K. Gandhi, who had a high regard and respect for Christ, also spoke against Christian evangelization saying that a Christian convert cuts himself off from his own people, and the advent of a missionary meant the disruption of the family, coming in the wake of change of dress, manners, language, food and drink¹⁷³. According to Arun Shorie, the Church is over-dependent on Rome financially, ideologically, organizationally, and even “spiritually too”¹⁷⁴.

Furthermore, the Hindu intellectuals perceive the existence and spread of the Church as a kind of threat to the very existence of the Indian nation. They see Christianity as a political weapon to take over India by foul means¹⁷⁵. Therefore, every activity of the Christian missionary is now opposed with greater vigour. They are seen as agents working to destroy Hindu religion and culture¹⁷⁶. Some people, such as Sita Ram Goel, do not consider Christianity as a religion but as a form of political power. “Christianity has never been a religion; it has always been a predatory imperialism par excellence”¹⁷⁷. Mission is therefore an attack on India. Indians who have experienced colonial domination for centuries are warned that the mission is going to be a different kind of colonisation. “This is silent invasion of India, invasion not by armies but by hard cash, less obvious but more invidious and therefore worthy of condemnation. God is sold like a piece of cake to the hungry multitude”¹⁷⁸.

Not only is missionary activity hated but now missionaries themselves are seen as agents of Western power and culture. “[T]here has been an atmosphere of communal hatred against the Christian missionaries in India as they have been

170 *Ibid.*

171 J.C. KUMARAPPA, *Christianity. Its Economy and Way of Life*, Ahmedabad, Navajivan Publishing House, 1945, p. 78.

172 S.M. PATHAK, *American Missionaries and Hinduism. A Study of Their Contacts from 1831 to 1910*, Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal Oriental Publishers and Book Sellers, 1967, p. 244.

173 J. MATTAM, ‘Indian Attempts Towards a Solution to the Problems of Conversion’, in J. MATTAM & S. KIM (ed.), *Mission and Conversion. A Reappraisal*, Mumbai, St. Paul’s Publications, 1996, p. 107.

174 A. SHOURIE, *Missionaries in India, Continuities, Changes, Dilemmas*, Delhi, ASA Publications, 1994, p. 224. See also A. RAMBACHAN, ‘Hindus and Christians. Celebrating Friendship and Facing Challenges with Hope’, in *Interreligious Insight* 6, 2008, 3, pp. 12-13.

175 M.V. KAMATH, ‘Evangelists are Subverting Indian Culture’, p. 15.

176 J.G. ARORA, ‘A Plot to Conquer India by Conversion’, in *Organiser* 50, 2008, 17, p. 64.

177 S.R. GOEL, *History of Hindu-Christian Encounters: AD 304 to 1996*, New Delhi, Voice of India, 1986, reprint 1996, p. 5.

178 KAMATH, ‘What is this All about Saving Souls?’, p. 8.

falsely accused of being the *dalāls* (agents) of foreign governments in the West. According to the RSS, all Christians should be driven out of the country at any cost since their loyalties are questionable¹⁷⁹.

The Christian missionaries are projected as indulging in conversion by force, coercion, inducement, and money from the West. “In the past the Christian Church and her missionaries have used every artifice to decimate Hinduism. They have used force, fraud, deception, coercion and offered material inducements to convert the Hindus of India to Christ”¹⁸⁰. They accuse Francis Xavier of making use of brutal force and naked persecution to convert people¹⁸¹. The accusation in present times is that the Christian missionaries do not use explicit force but veiled coercion.

In general, it could be concluded from their perspective that both Christianity and Islam can be identified as “foreign” because they accept and employ cultural paradigms, which largely have their origins outside India¹⁸². These views are trickled down to the ordinary people. Most Indians think of Christianity as the religion of the missionaries¹⁸³.

Mild Perception

Not all views about Christianity in India are negative. Indians in general have the capacity to appreciate the spiritual message of Jesus. There are many intellectuals and writers who have seen the goodness of Christianity as a religion and who have accepted Christ as the saviour. Some were attracted to Christ and accepted him as their saviour while his moral teaching attracted some others, and others were inspired by his life. Many people appreciate the selfless service of Christian Churches. We shall now see the positive elements of Christianity as seen in the writings of some of the intellectuals.

One important person who thought that the moral elements of Christianity were needed and good for Indian society is Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833)¹⁸⁴. After studying the Bible, and after his long association with Christians, he published a book in 1820 entitled, *The Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness*. This is a collection of extracts from the Gospels and was primarily intended to enlist the Hindu intellectuals in the cause of the moral reform of Hindu society¹⁸⁵. With this book he introduced Christian ethics to Hindu society.

179 B.N. BANERJEE, *Religious Conversions in India*, New Delhi, Harnam Publications, 1982, p. 319. The present researcher adds what is in parenthesis.

180 B.D. BHARTI, *Christian Conversions and Abuse of Religious Freedom in India*, Vellore, Erabooks, 1979, p. 31.

181 *Ibid.* p. 20.

182 P.M. COLLINS, *Christian Inculturation in India*, Hampshire, Ashgate, 2007, p. 18.

183 J.W. GRANT, *God's People in India*, Madras, The Christian Literature Society, 1961, p. 104.

184 B. ROBINSON, *Christians Meeting Hindus. An Analysis and Theological Critique of the Hindu-Christian Encounter in India*, Cumbria, Regnum, 2004, p. 6.

185 BOYD, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, p. 20.

K.L. Seshagiri Rao, a Hindu scholar, says that many Hindus adore Christ while some acknowledge Jesus as an *avātār*; some others consider him as a *yogī*, or a *satguru* and so on¹⁸⁶. Svāmī Ranganathananda (1908-2005) feels that a synthesis of Indian thought and Christian message is possible and important. He says that the message of Jesus and his life have found their lodgement in the Indian soul, through the irresistible appeal of their beauty and charm¹⁸⁷. He thinks that the Gospel of Jesus is a Gospel of redemption and our part is to ask, seek, and knock¹⁸⁸.

Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836-1886) had a unique vision and spiritual experience of Christ. He found Jesus as the supreme model or master of God-realization. Jesus is the one who realized the divine within. "Christ's passion and the conviction that humanity finds salvation through his blood are part of Ramakrishna's image of Jesus. However, he does not identify himself with people who need such a salvation. On the contrary he identifies himself with Jesus"¹⁸⁹. Svāmī Vivekananda (1863-1902) accepted the teaching of Jesus and saw God in the person of Jesus in the same way he saw God in Kṛṣṇa. Similarly, although M.K. Gandhi (1869-1948) did not approve of conversion to Christianity, he was attracted to Christ. He was pleased with the "Sermon on the Mount", and kept a picture of Jesus on the wall over his desk. Even today at his *āśram* in Wardha the Christian prayer, "Our Father," is recited daily.

Keshab Chandra Sen (1838-1884) was another intellectual who accepted Christ as the saviour of the heart and who wrote about Christ. Christ became the centre of his life and the guiding force in all his thinking. His devotion to Christ led him to incorporate into his branch of the *Samāj* (*Brahm Samāj* of which he was the head) many features taken from the life of the Christian Church, and ultimately these became a normal part of the life and practice of the body, which he named "the Church of the New Dispensation"¹⁹⁰.

Dayanand Bharati calls himself a Hindu Christ *Bhakta*. He considers Jesus as his Guru and says that Christ sought him and allowed him to be his devotee but to retain his identity as a Hindu. He has been preaching this message. He has written two books; *Living Water and Indian Bowl*, and *Understanding Hinduism*. He believes that Christian missionaries have not understood Hinduism. He feels that India has enough religions and does not need more religions. Nevertheless, what is needed is "the living Christ in His original form as sent by God, lived by our Lord, witnessed by his disciples and promoted by His *Bhaktas* (devotees) in early centuries"¹⁹¹.

As Prof. Ramaswami acknowledges:

186 K.L.S. RAO, 'Hindu-Christian Dialogue. A Hindu Perspective', in *Interreligious Insight* 8, 2010, 3, p. 30.

187 S. RANGANATHANANDA, *The Christ We Adore*, Calcutta, The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1960, p. 48.

188 *Ibid.*

189 SCHOUTEN, *Jesus as Guru*, p. 88.

190 BOYD, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, pp. 35-36.

191 BHARATI, *Living Water and Indian Bowl*, p. 3. What is in parenthesis is added by the present researcher.

it (the church) runs schools, colleges, hospitals, nursing homes, orphanages, etc., and they are the most efficiently run, the most sought-after institutions. Convent school education is a mark of both civilization and self-discipline. ...There is no basis for the allegation that there is indoctrination or proselytizing as far as my experience of the working in these institutions goes¹⁹².

The thick volume, *Shabda Shakti Sangam*, edited by Vandana Mataji, presents the opinion of seven Hindu intellectuals about Christ and Christianity¹⁹³. Professor Uppalappatti Manuswami says that he has unshakable faith in the divinity and power of Christ. He runs to Christ in any need, as a child rushes to its mother. Sri Tyagimayi declares that Christ came to her as a Guru. Devi Menon feels that Christ is the embodiment of all the virtues. However, none of these intellectuals is attracted to Christianity as a religion or Church as such¹⁹⁴.

There are also other important people such as Nehemiah Goreh, Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya, Pandita Ramabai, Sadhu Sundar Singh, V. Chakkarai, A.J. Appasamy, P. Chenchiah, and many others who found the treasures of Christianity and joined the Christian fold by accepting baptism. We shall examine the efforts of some of these intellectuals later in this chapter.

Our short survey of the perception of Hindu intellectuals reflects the major points of resistance to Christianity. The stronger perceptions are clearly based on cultural and social reasons. They view Christianity as too Western and foreign, and as a threat to Indian culture. Even those who have a mild perception do not want a Western form of Christianity. On the other hand, our survey shows that the spiritual aspect of Christianity, the person and the message of Jesus and the ethics from his teachings, do find a home in India.

2.1.2.2. The Perceptions by Christian Theologians

Many Christian theologians confirm the perception of Christianity as foreign by Hindus as a true perception. They trace the colonial origin of the Church as an important cause for this perception. They see this foreign identity of the Church in the very life style of some of the Indian Christians themselves. We shall now see, from the writings of some Indian theologians, their perceptions of the status of the Church in India.

The general perception of the majority of Indians about Christianity as foreign and Western is accepted as a true perception by most of the Indian theologi-

192 S. RAMASAMY, 'The Catholic Church and Catholics. As I See Them', in The CBCI Commission for Evangelisation, *Christianity in India. Its True Face*, New Delhi, CBCI, 1981, p.72. What is in parentheses is added by the present researcher.

193 V. MATAJI (ed.), *Shabda Shakti Sangam*, Rishikesh, Jeevan Dhara Sadhana Kutir, 1995, pp. 314-339.

194 See for the details about their views in *ibid*.

ans too¹⁹⁵. All the Churches that exist in India today are not really Indian Churches, but transplanted Churches, which have retained many of their original foreign characteristics¹⁹⁶, and appear as carbon copies of their counterparts in the West¹⁹⁷. Even after centuries of Christian existence in India, Christians are seen as foreigners. "India is a land of ancient civilization and Christianity has existed here from apostolic times. Paradoxical though it may seem, the various Churches in India are still viewed as foreign entities"¹⁹⁸.

The Christian theologians agree that many Indian Christians have a foreign identity. They are also aware that people cannot live peacefully with a foreign identity. But, this is precisely the situation of the Indian Christians¹⁹⁹. The Christian theologians feel that conversion to Christianity has given the converted an idea that they are no longer Indians but Westerners. The converts have copied the western style of life. Some converts who were vegetarians before conversion began to eat meat, even beef. Indian names were relinquished for western names. Some Christian women discarded the traditional sari in favour of the short skirts and high-heeled shoes of western women, which to most Indians appear ridiculous²⁰⁰. The new converts sometimes despise the feasts, ceremonies, and the customs of their earlier life. They are cut away from the main stream of their national and social life²⁰¹. Some converts were alienated on a superficial level but "all [the Christians] have been alienated from the spiritual and religious wealth of the country's religious traditions"²⁰².

Not only did many of these Christians imitate the western way of life, but they feel and imagine being more western than Indians. "Many of them feel as a group that owes allegiance to a foreign institution. Even when it comes to strict religious matters, such as its symbol system, its manners of worship, its capacity to communicate God-experience etc., its reference is to some organization or to some community outside the country"²⁰³.

The theologians also think that by conversion to Christianity a Hindu individual is alienated from the Indian culture. This view is seen in the testimony of the converts themselves. The new converts were asked to keep away from any-

195 MATTAM, 'Indian Attempts Towards a Solution to the Problems of Conversion', p. 103. See also F.A. PLATTNER, *The Catholic Church in India. Yesterday and Today*, Allahabad, St. Paul Publications, 1964, pp. 134-139.

196 K. PATHIL, 'Theology of the Local Church', in *Jeevadhara* 28, 1998, 166, p. 269.

197 P. SUDHAKAR, 'Proclaiming Christ in India Today', in M. Zachariah (ed.), *The Indian Church. Identity and Fulfilment*, Madras, C.L.S./ISPCK/ L.P.H, 1971, p. 36.

198 The final statement of the 19th Annual Meeting of the Indian Theological Association [hereafter shortened as ITA] 1996, in K. KUNNUPURAM, E. D'LIMA & J. PARAPPILLY (eds.), *The Church in India in search of a New Identity*, Bangalore, NBCLC, 1997, p. 391.

199 P. CHEMPAKASSERY, 'Jerusalem Pentecost. An Indian Reinterpretation and Challenges', in *Jeevadhara* 34, 2004, 202, p. 117.

200 ASIRVATHAM, *Christianity in the Indian Crucible*, p. 156.

201 D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Theology of Evangelization in the Indian Context*, Bangalore, NBCLC, 1984, p. 20.

202 J. SALDANHA, *Mission Today. Themes and Issues*, Bangalore, Claretian Publications, 2006, p. 128.

203 P. PUTHENANGADY, 'Christian Community as a Multi-Cultural Reality', in K. KUNNUPURAM, E. D'LIMA & J. PARAPPILLY (eds.), *The Church in India in Search of a New Identity*, pp. 184-185.

thing that was “Hindu”²⁰⁴. However, Hinduism as a culture and a religion is not separated.

Collectively, the Indian Theological Association also feels that the ordinary citizens of India identify Christianity with Western culture and accuses Christians of being aliens²⁰⁵. Even the Catholic Bishops Conference of India²⁰⁶ is aware of this and acknowledges the fact that people see the Church in India as foreign. In its evaluation report it is stated, “In spite of the fact that Christianity came to India from its very birth, it is still considered to be a foreign religion in many parts of India and the Catholics are looked upon with a certain amount of suspicion”²⁰⁷.

The Christianity that was brought by the western missionaries to India from the 16th century was presented in a form that was very much beyond the religious and cultural susceptibility of India, in spite of their best efforts²⁰⁸. As Karokaran points out, in theory and practice, the evangelization process that was conceived, executed, and handed down from the colonial era contained and unleashed “a terminator gene”, a “killer virus”, that unwittingly tended to wipe out much of the concrete realization of the unfolding identity of the people in India through the centuries²⁰⁹. In addition, the past still seems fresh in the minds of the Indians and they associate it with the West and its culture²¹⁰. “Hindus generally identify Indian Christianity even now with its pre-independence colonial version, with an absolute claim of Truth and an uncompromising attitude towards other religions”²¹¹.

The Indian Christian theologians are perturbed about the growing tendency of Hindu extremists to attack Christians and Christian Institutions. The recent attacks on Christians in Orissa, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, etc., show an organized violence against Christianity. A hate campaign is targeted against the Church and the Hindu fundamentalists are spreading extremist activities. Some states in India have passed anti-conversion laws. Currently they are in force in

204 S. BATUMALAI, ‘Malaysian Theology. An Understanding of Conversion from a Malaysian Perspective’, in T.D. FRANCIS & F.J. BALANSUNDARAM (eds.), *Asian Expressions of Christian Commitment. A Reader in Asian Theology*, Madras, The Christian Literature Society, 1992, pp. 355-356. See also Metropolitan G.M. OTHATHIOS, ‘Mission and Uniqueness of Jesus Christ’, in MATTAM & KIM (eds.), *Dimensions of Mission in India*, p. 85.

205 The Final Statement of the Eleventh Annual Meeting of ITA (1987), in S. ARULSAM (ed.), *Communalism in India. A Challenge to Theologizing*, Bangalore, Claretian Publications, 1988, p. 9.

206 Hereafter shortened as CBCI.

207 CBCI Evaluation Report, art. 793, p. 260, quoted by D. D’SOUZA, ‘The Challenges to the Church Today’, in P. PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Yesu Krist Jayanti 2000. Towards a New Society*, Bangalore, National Committee Yesu Krist Jayanti 2000, 2001, p. 295. See also T. PUTHACAMURY, *The Church in Independent India*, Bombay, Examiner Press, 1996, p. 13.

208 A. KAROKARAN, *Evangelization and Diakonia. A Study in the Indian Perspective*, Bangalore, Dharmaram Publications, 1978, p. 190.

209 A. KAROKARAN, ‘Mission. An Alternative Model’, in *Third Millennium* 3, 2000, 1, p. 32.

210 S.M. MICHAEL, ‘Analysis of the Society at the Micro-Level. The Indian Rural Reality’, in D.S. AMALORPAVADASS (ed.), *The Indian Church in the Struggle for a New Society*, Bangalore, NBCLC, 1981, p. 137.

211 L. MALIECKAL, ‘Syro-Malabar Mission. New Challenges in Perspective’, in G.H. AMBOOKEN (ed.), *Mission and Community Building. National Seminar, Bhopal*, n. p., CMI-CMC Publications, 1990, p. 164. See also WILFRED, *On the Banks of Ganges*, p. 225; ABHISHIKTANANDA, *The Church in India*, Madras, The Christian Literature Society, 1971 p. 12.

five states - Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, and Gujarat. In two other states - Arunachal Pradesh and Rajasthan - the laws have been passed but not yet implementation. "Hindutva slogans and anti-conversion propaganda have been raised more vehemently in recent years, and more states have promulgated anti-conversion laws on the plea that conversion to Christianity is destroying Indian culture"²¹². Besides legitimizing anti-Christian violence in the popular mind, anti-conversion laws give Hindu extremists an opportunity to attack any missionary and label him/her as indulging in conversion activities.

Christian theologians feel that the dislike for Christianity has become much stronger in recent years than in earlier times. "Christians continue to be seen as alienated people, and their institutions, especially their schools and colleges are considered to be centres of alienation"²¹³. Formerly, the educational institutions and health care centres run by the Christians were considered centres of selfless service. The theologians are also agonized that many Hindus in general somewhere doubt the loyalty and patriotism of Christians. "Sincere patriots, who still think of Christianity as a foreign religion, fear that by people becoming Christians, they may lose or weaken their loyalty to India and perhaps in an emergency even, betray India. They might feel that Catholics especially owe their loyalty to Rome more than to Delhi"²¹⁴.

We could see some kind of parallel in the history of the western Church during the late 19th century. The persecutions of the Catholic Church in Germany, especially at the time of Otto van Bismarck (1815-98), who had sought to boost the power of the secular state and reduce the social influence of the Roman Catholic Church by instituting political control over the church activities. Under his policy, called *Kulturkampf*, (struggle for culture, 1871-1878), Catholic civil officials were removed from their jobs,²¹⁵ and several bishops, priests, nuns and Christian lay leaders were arrested and persecuted. A wave of anti-Catholicism and anti-Catholic propaganda accompanied the *Kulturkampf*, connected with outright hatred by the liberals who considered Catholics the enemy of the modern German nation.

2.1.3. *The Desire for an Inculturated Indian Church*

212 P.S. RAJ, *A Christian Folk Religion in India. A Study of the Small Church Movement in Andhra Pradesh, with Special Reference to the Bible Mission of Devadas*, Bangalore, Centre for Contemporary Christianity, 2004, p. 277.

213 S. ANANAD, 'Inculturation in India. Yesterday Today and Tomorrow', in *Indian Missiological Review* 19, 1997, 1, p. 20.

214 LESSER, *Why I Am Here*, p. 181.

215 M.L. ANDERSON and K. BARKIN, 'The Myth of Puttkamer Purge and the Reality of Kulturkampf. Some reflections on the Historiography of Imperial Germany', in *The Journal of Modern History* 54, 1982, 4, pp. 657-658. See also A.E. MCGRATH, *An Introduction to Christianity*, Malden, Blackwell Publishers, 1997, p. 321.

We have seen that people see the Church in India as a foreign institution and that it could not insert its roots into the Indian soil. Nevertheless, the Church in India as a whole was not very happy with this situation. Some individuals, and later the Church as a whole, have tried to make the Church more “Indian”. Their desire is manifest in the documents of the Bishops Conferences as well as in the writings of Indian theologians and their association.

2.1.3.1. In the Church Documents

In the Documents of the CBCI

The desire for an Indian Church, or for the inculturation of the Church, was strong among the bishops of India at the close of the Second Vatican Council. The call of Vatican II for renewal and inculturation was taken seriously by them as is manifested in the statements of their conferences and the steps they took immediately after the council. In their first CBCI Meeting after the Council at Delhi in 1966, they decided to open a national centre for the specific purpose of bringing in liturgical renewal. Although the need for inculturation of all the aspects of Church was reflected in the documents in the initial days of the CBCI²¹⁶, it was a time when the whole attention for inculturation was focused on liturgical adaptation. They found the liturgical renewal the essential thing for inculturation. The bishops were convinced that the Church must create a liturgy that would be genuine embodiment of the worship of its members - not words and gestures borrowed and without meaning. It must seek forms of ministry through which the grace of God is effectively channelled²¹⁷. Thus, the centre, called the National Liturgical and Catechetical Centre was solemnly inaugurated in 1967 in Bangalore²¹⁸. Later, in 1971, the CBCI found that the Biblical apostolate should also be organized in a similar manner as that of the liturgy and catechesis²¹⁹. Therefore, a department and commission for Biblical apostolate was added to the National Liturgical and Catechetical Centre. Thus, the centre from then onwards was called the National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical centre (NBCLC).

The centre conducted several All-India Liturgical Meetings and various consultations on liturgical adaptation²²⁰. As a result of these meetings and deliberations, the process of liturgical indigenization was to be introduced in two or three phases²²¹. The first phase of liturgical inculturation, called the 12 Points of Adaptation, (which we shall discuss later), was approved by the Catholic Bishops’

216 The Preliminary draft of the Workshop of the All Indian Seminar on ‘The Church in India Today’, p. 9.

217 CBCI, *Proclaiming Christ in India. Source Book for the Preparation of the Roman Synod 1974. The Evangelization of the Modern World*, New Delhi, CBCI Centre, 1973, p. 51.

218 See the details about the founding of the centre in, J.A.G. VAN LEEUWEN, *Fully Indian Authentically Christian*, Kampen, Kok, 1990, pp. 2-8.

219 *Ibid.* p. 19.

220 For the details about the various committees and sub committees and the procedure, see J. MICHAEL, *Liturgical Renewal in India*, Bangalore, Asian Trading Corporation, 2004, pp. 25-30.

221 D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Gospel and Culture*, Bangalore, NBCLC, 1978, p. 73.

Conference of India and the Holy See in 1969²²². The second phase was the creative and meaningful translation of the liturgical rites into the various vernaculars. It also aimed at composing an original prayer formula and inclusion of the reading and chants from non-Christian scriptures. It also aimed at the composition of an Indian anaphora, which would proclaim the marvels done by God not only in Israel but also in India and in the whole world, and the formation of an Indian order of mass²²³. The third phase of inculturation intended to include the use of scriptures of other religions not only for prayer and meditations but also for official liturgical celebrations²²⁴. The CBCI felt that the Church had to be locally inculturated and its liturgy should reflect the local culture. Therefore, the local Church must, in fidelity to Christ, work out its own distinctive pattern to meet the exigencies of the local situations²²⁵.

Besides liturgical inculturation, some other concrete steps were taken by the initiative of the CBCI to put into practice the desire of inculturation. Hence, we see that the CBCI commission for dialogue had been organizing “live together” sessions in which members of different religions spend several days together for fraternal friendship, prayer, meditation and shared reflections²²⁶. Such meetings were occasions for mutual understanding and development of right attitudes to different religions.

We could also see that the CBCI had taken note of the importance of spirituality in the Indian context and stressed the need for presenting the Church as a spiritual entity. We might call this a desire for spiritual inculturation. The bishops felt that the spirituality practiced in the Church was not sufficient to make an impression on the Indian mind. “The Church in India starts with a heavy handicap of four centuries of ‘Latin’ piety and religious culture which must give way to a more ‘inculturated’ spirituality”²²⁷. Therefore, the way forward for the Church was to accept the Indian spiritual tradition and present herself as a worshipping community in which community prayer is expressed in traditional Indian spirituality²²⁸. The bishops felt that the Church needed greater spiritual sensitivity and that the Church was in need of men and women who know and respect the non-Christian traditions of India²²⁹.

Individual bishops also raise their voice about the need for inculturation of the Church. Cardinal J. Parecattil, in his inaugural address in the general meeting of CBCI on January 4, 1976 at Hyderabad stated his vision of inculturation: “It is up to us to give a *twentieth century Indian expression* to the Church in India in

222 *Ibid.* p. 87.

223 *Ibid.* p. 73.

224 VAN LEEUWEN, *Fully Indian- Authentically Christian*, p. 70.

225 *Proclaiming Christ in India. Source Book for the Preparation of the Roman Synod 1974- the Evangelization of the Modern World*, CBCI Centre, New Delhi, p. 51.

226 ROBINSON, *Christians Meeting Hindus*, p. 57.

227 The Preliminary Draft of the Workshop on the All-India Seminar, p. 9.

228 CBCI, *Proclaiming Christ in India*, p. 51.

229 *Orientation Papers E/23, The Preliminary Draft of the Workshop of the All Indian Seminar on ‘The Church in India Today’*, New Delhi, CBCI, 1969, p. 14-15.

accordance with the demands of contemporary culture and the new hopes and new awareness created in the people by the Vatican II²³⁰. In the same meeting, Archbishop Angelo Fernandez pointed out that the full growth of the Church in India to an authentic growth and maturity requires that it be Indian and Christian at the same time.²³¹ Cardinal Ivan Dias, the former archbishop of Bombay and the Prefect of the Congregation for Evangelization of Peoples said that the task of proclaiming Jesus in a way that enables the people of India to identify with him, remaining faithful to both their own culture and the teaching of Christ, is a paramount challenge. Therefore, according to him inculturation should be the cultural expression of one's faith and the faith expression of one's culture. He also admits that the efforts at inculturation must be meaningful to the outsider as well²³².

Opposing view

While the documents of the CBCI do not contain any explicit voices opposing the very idea of inculturation, some references point to the differences of opinion on inculturation. Cardinal J. Parecatil, in his inaugural address in the general meeting of CBCI on January 4, 1976 at Hyderabad, had already referred to the differences of opinion of some bishops on the theology of local Church²³³. Moreover, a closer look at the process of decision-making about the liturgical inculturation provides a glimpse of the opposing tendencies present among the bishops. We have earlier mentioned that the first phase of the inculturation, which is called the 12 Points of Adaptation, was approved by the bishops and the Holy See. The document says that two-thirds majority approved it²³⁴. While we have nothing against the procedure or approval, it is clear that there were many bishops who did not approve it. There could have been anywhere from 0 to 33% of the bishops against it. Up to one-third was not in favour of this inculturation, either the first phase or completely.

The disagreements and differences of opinion are reflected in the report of the meeting of the standing committee of the CBCI on the Indian Order of Mass held in Bangalore in 1976. The report says that the chairperson had pointed out the confusion that had arisen as to what had been forbidden by Rome, whether it was only the Indian anaphora, or also the "Indian Order of the Mass". Some bishops felt that the "Indian Order of the Mass" only put into effect the 12 Points of Adaptation already permitted for use in India. However, others felt that the "Indian Order of the Mass" was entirely different in structure from the Roman Mass and contained many points that were not allowed by Rome. The report says that

230 J. PARECATIL, 'Vision of the Church and the Role of the CBCI', in P. D'SOUZA (ed.), *Report of the General Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India*, Hyderabad, CBCI, 1976, p. 12.

231 A. FERNANDES, 'A Bishop in the Church of Christ', in P. D'SOUZA (ed.), *Report of the General Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India*, p. 48.

232 I. DIAS, 'A Dialogue of Cultures. Cultural Issues in Mission', in *Cultures and Faith*, Calcutta, Pontificium Consilium de Calcutta, 2000, p. 123.

233 J. PARECATIL, 'Vision of the Church and the Role of the CBCI', p. 10.

234 MICHAEL, *Liturgical Renewal in India*, p. 31.

bishops could not come into an agreement on the above-mentioned subject. This report indicates not only the confusion that prevailed in the midst of the Indian hierarchy on the question of the “Order of the Mass for India” but also the serious problem of inculturation faced by the Church in India, as they were unable to come to a common plan and programme²³⁵.

Again, when we take a closer look we find that no diocese in India has adopted the 12 points fully into the liturgy, though two thirds had voted in favour of it. Moreover, in later periods when the regional conferences were authorised to take initiative and carry forward the task of inculturation according to the regional needs, none of them made any new Order for Mass or anaphora. There was no encouragement for revitalizing the efforts for inculturation in India in the latest instruction from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Redemptionis Sacramentum*.

The second phase of the inculturation - the formation of an Indian anaphora - was not approved by the CBCI due to the lack of required majority. For our present purpose, the lack of majority is a pointer to the difference of view and hesitation among the Indian bishops on inculturation.

In the Documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences

The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) speaks about the need for the Churches in Asia to be local and indigenous. “To preach the Gospel in Asia today we must make the message and the life of Christ truly incarnate in the minds and lives of our peoples”²³⁶. First, the bishops realized that the Church was very much alien and not sensitive to the needs and aspirations of the people²³⁷. The Church, they say, is foreign in its lifestyle, in its institutional structure, in its rituals and worship, in its western-trained leadership, and in its theology²³⁸.

The bishops then wanted to make the Churches in Asia local Churches in its true sense. The documents of FABC reflect this desire for the formation of inculturated local Churches. In the first plenary assembly they noted, “The primary task of evangelization then, at this time in our history, is the building up of a truly local Church”²³⁹. The Conference recommends that the Christian communities should develop a positive appreciation for the culture of their own communities²⁴⁰. They expect that the Christian communities will reflect back this positive attitude in the creation of an indigenous spirituality, liturgy, and art and in a rele-

235 *Ibid.* pp. 53-54.

236 G. ROSALES & C.G. AREVALO (eds.), *FAPA I*, Quezon City, Claretian Publications, 1997, p. 14. Compilations of all documents of FABC from 1970 to 1991 can be found in G. ROSALES & C.G. AREVALO (eds.), *FAPA I*, Quezon City, Claretian Publications, 1997, and from 1992 to 2006 in F.-J. EILERS (ed.), *FAPA II* (1997), *FAPA III* (2002) and *FAPA IV* (2007), Quezon City, Claretian Publications.

237 D. VARAYILAN, *Spirit and the Pilgrim Church. A Study of Yves Congar and the FABC Documents*, Delhi, ISPCK, 2008, p. 108.

238 F.-J. EILERS (ed.), *FAPA IV*, p. 195-196.

239 *FAPA II*, p. 14.

240 *Ibid.* p. 140.

vant theological reflection and the adoption of a style of life in harmony with one's cultural heritage²⁴¹.

The formation of local Churches is, for the bishops, an important aspect since true local Church means a Church that is incarnated. Inculturation, for the bishops, is not a mere adaptation of a ready-made Christianity into a given situation but rather a creative embodiment of the Word in the local Church.

The local Church is a Church incarnate in a people, a Church indigenous and inculturated. And this means concretely a Church in continuous, humble, and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, and the religions; in brief, with all the life-realities of the people in whose midst it has sunk its roots deeply, and whose history and life it gladly makes its own. It seeks to share in whatever truly belongs to that people: its meanings and values, its aspirations, its thoughts and language, its songs and its artistry²⁴².

They say that the local Churches should announce the message of the Gospel in their own social and cultural idioms²⁴³. "In the work of inculturation" said the Bishops, "we need to go back to our Asian mythologies and stories. We need to 'sit at the feet' of our Asian spiritual masters and sages and allow ourselves to be nourished by their wisdom, their sacred texts, not only our own"²⁴⁴.

In the second plenary assembly held at Calcutta (1978), the theme was "Prayer: the life of the Church of Asia". There they articulated the importance of spiritual inculturation. The bishops emphasized that the Churches should be able to take over the riches of our nations. They wanted the Churches to accept those ways of prayer, which have been developed by the native genius of their peoples and have played a vital and honoured role in shaping the traditions of their lands²⁴⁵. They think that Asian spirituality has much to offer to authentic Christian spirituality. They want the Churches to imbibe the contemplation of deep interiority and immanence, venerable sacred books and writings, traditions of asceticism and renunciation, techniques of contemplation, simplified prayer-forms and other popular expressions of faith and piety easily available even to simpler folk²⁴⁶.

2.1.3.2. In the Writings of Indian Theologians

Statements of the Indian Theological Association

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

²⁴² *Ibid.* p. 14.

²⁴³ *FAPA* II, p. 198 & *FAPA* IV, p. 199.

²⁴⁴ *FAPA* III, p. 121.

²⁴⁵ *FAPA* I, pp. 34-35.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p. 35 & 57.

The Indian Theological Association (ITA) has voiced its desire for making the Church in India fully Indian and fully Christian. The Association, in its 19th annual meeting, came out with a strong statement that, "The Church in India must situate her identity in the context of 97% of the Indian population seeking their salvation outside the Church without any reference to it"²⁴⁷.

At the outset, the Association acknowledges the failures of the Christian missions of the past saying that due to its misunderstanding of Indian customs and traditions and because of its self-proclaimed superiority, the Church in India has, in the past, often looked down on other religions and cultures²⁴⁸. The Association in statements from other meetings also echoes similar view. It found that in the colonial period, evangelisation was more or less thought of and practiced as Europeanization. "It has to be also confessed that the history of missions in Asia, Africa and Latin America has been one of Roman ecclesiastical and western cultural colonialism. Roman and western forms of Christianity in fact often denigrated and even annihilated the cultures of several nations and peoples. To become a Christian often meant a change in one's identity"²⁴⁹.

The members of ITA feel that while being proud as Indian Christians, the need for further genuine insertion into the Indian culture is still an ideal to be achieved²⁵⁰. For this purpose, they desire that the Indian Christians should reclaim the "Indianness" of experience and expression in the religious pursuit²⁵¹. They see inculturation into the significant areas of Christian life as a means of bringing credibility to the Christian community in India²⁵². They think that the local languages, the positive cultural elements, values and traditions all contribute to its identity²⁵³. They wish to bring in a conscious inculturation, which is not limited to adopting external features of the other, but accepting the myths of the other inasmuch as we succeed in establishing a cultural symbiosis²⁵⁴.

The Association feels that the Church becomes indigenous by drawing inspiration from the Scriptures and symbols, sages and traditions of India. According to them, the Christian faith has to be understood and expressed in the manifold forms of local cultures. Even the Christian institutions and the adminis-

247 The Statement of the 19th Annual Meeting of the ITA 1996, in KUNNUPURAM, D'LIMA & PARAPPALLY (eds.), *Church in India in Search of a New Identity*, p. 391.

248 The Statement of the 22nd Annual Meeting of the ITA 1999, in J. PARAPPALLY & E. MONTEIRO (eds.), *Hope at the Dawn of a New Century*, Bangalore, Dharmaram Publications, 2000, p. 196.

249 The Statement of the Eleventh Annual Meeting of the ITA 1987, in S. ARULSAM (ed.), *Communalism in India. A Challenge to Theologizing*, Bangalore, Claretian Publications, 1988, p. 9.

250 The Statement of the 23rd Annual Meeting of the ITA 2000, in J. MATTAM & P. AROCKIADOSS (eds.), *Hindutva. An Indian Christian Response*, Bangalore, Dharmaram Publications, 2002, p. 314.

251 *Ibid.*

252 The Statement of the 22nd Annual Meeting of the ITA, 1999, p. 198.

253 The Statement of the 21st Annual Meeting of the ITA 1998, in E. D'LIMA & M. GONSALVES (eds.), *What Does Jesus Christ Mean? The Meaningfulness of Jesus Christ amid Religious Pluralism in India*, Bangalore, Indian Theological Association, 1999, p. 185.

254 The Statement of the 13th Annual Meeting of ITA, in *Theology of Religions. Towards an Indian Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, Tiruchirappilly, St. Paul's Seminary, 1989, p. 11.

trative structures of the Church have to be reshaped in tune with the wisdom and values of India²⁵⁵.

The earlier meetings of the Association were more concerned about the liberation praxis²⁵⁶. Even there, they pointed out that the Church must liberate itself from a mentality that negates experiences other than Greco-Roman ones, and must establish complete equality of rites²⁵⁷, so that, in the end, all important rites must give way to genuinely indigenous forms of ecclesiastical expressions²⁵⁸.

Concerning the future mission of the Church in India, the Association wants the Church to radically rethink her mission and reformulate her image if she is to be faithful to Jesus Christ and relevant to her situation²⁵⁹. One of the means the Association suggests is to get out of the ghettos and be a salt in society by which they can permeate it with the values of the Gospel²⁶⁰. The whole intention of the future mission, in the understanding of the Association, should not be limited to the numerical increase of the community who seek baptism but emergence of a community of believers in Christ²⁶¹.

In the Writings of Individual Theologians

It is not possible to make a survey of the works of all the Indian theologians, but we examine some Indian theologians to give an idea of the general trend seen in their works. In general, they have the feeling that the survival of Christianity depends upon its becoming indigenous. They think that Christianity has no assured future in India unless and until it becomes naturalized in the country of its adoption²⁶². Therefore, the renewal through inculturation is an important and urgent task of the Church in India²⁶³.

They call the Church for a deeper immersion and inculturation into the lives of the Indian people²⁶⁴. Inculturation for them is not just the external adaptation of certain aspects of the life of the Church, but is the result of the genuine encounter of Christ and the Gospel with the soul or spirit of a culture of a people²⁶⁵. This should not be limited to a question of taking some symbols to replace

255 The Statement of the 23rd Annual Meeting of the ITA, 2000, p. 314.

256 The 8th and 9th meeting of ITA was on the same theme of evolving an Indian theology of liberation. See for details K. PATHIL, 'What happened at Poonamallee? A Report', in P. PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Towards an Indian Theology of Liberation*, Bangalore, NBCLC, 1986, p. 1.

257 There are three rites in India namely, the Latin, the Syro-Malabar and the Syro-Malankara.

258 'The Statement of the 9th Annual Meeting of the ITA, 1985', in PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Towards an Indian Theology of Liberation*, p. 14.

259 The Statement of the 19th Annual Meeting of the ITA 1996, p. 396.

260 *Ibid.* p. 397.

261 *Ibid.*

262 ASIRVATHAM, *Christianity in the Indian Crucible*, p. 156.

263 J. PATHRAPANKAL, 'Communities without Cultural Alienations. Salient Biblical Perspectives', in *Third Millennium* 2, 1999, 3, p. 18.

264 D. D'SOUZA, 'The Challenges to the Church Today', in PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Yesu Krist Jayanti 2000*, p. 294

265 K. PATHIL, 'The Self-Understanding of the Church in India Today', in D'LIMA & GONSALVES, *What Does Jesus Christ Mean?*, p. 97.

the existing Christian symbols²⁶⁶. The Church in India should be Indian and genuinely Christian. This calls for a serious effort to insert the Christian faith and the Gospel way of life into the culture of the people²⁶⁷, which implies a process of death leading to newness of life. Anto Karokaran thinks that without becoming Indian from within, the Church's present form of existence in India will be on a plane of borrowed identity. Therefore, he thinks that, as such, she will forever have a precarious existence in India and her efforts to bring about a decisive encounter between Gospel and cultures of India in the third millennium will remain doomed to failure as in the previous centuries²⁶⁸.

Indian theologians want this inculturation not only in some parts of the Church but as comprehensive as possible and including all the aspects of the Church. "The Churches in India have to make an all-out attempt for it [inculturation], have to embark on a total programme of inculturation, starting with the easier forms and going on to more difficult ones"²⁶⁹. It is not seen merely as one of the missions of the Church but as central, inevitable, and imperative²⁷⁰. They want to see the Church as truly Indian by radical inculturation of all aspects of her life²⁷¹. They think that the very ecclesiality of the Church in India is in jeopardy as long as she is not able to imbibe the Indian culture in all her aspects²⁷². They think that the Church has to move beyond the Judeo-Christian tradition and discover what God has done and spoken in the history of the Indian people, and see the unity and continuity of God's revelation and salvific plan²⁷³.

These theologians are aware of the existential reality of the Indian Church. On the one hand, the Church in India is said to be implanted in the soil and well-established but, on the other hand, she is not yet vital and dynamic enough or incarnated and integrated enough in the life of the Indian society; she is not yet mature and adult enough to be original, to take up full responsibility, to re-think her mission in the context of her particular community, and to re-formulate her message in order to make it relevant and meaningful to the citizens of the country²⁷⁴.

266 P. PUTHENANGADY, 'Christian Community as a Multi-Cultural Reality', in KUNNUPURAM, D'LIMA & PARAPPALLY (eds.), *Church in India In Search of a New Identity*, p. 188.

267 K. KUNNUPURAM, 'The Church of My Dreams', in A. KANJAMALA (ed.), *Integral Mission Dynamics. An Interdisciplinary Study of the Catholic Church in India*, New Delhi, Intercultural Publications, 1995, p. 420.

268 A. KAROKARAN, 'Mission. An Alternative Model', p. 29.

269 L. MALEICKAL, 'Total Inculturation as Mission of the Churches in India', in F. KANICHAKATTIL (ed.), *Church in Context*, Bangalore, Dharmaram Publications, 1996, p. 206.

270 P. CHEMPAKASSERY, 'Jerusalem Pentecost. An Indian Reinterpretation and Challenges', in *Jeevadhara* 34 2004, 202, p. 11.

271 K. KUNNUPURAM, 'Cultural Autonomy of People and the Autonomy of Local Churches', in *Third Millennium* 3, 2001, 1, p. 43.

272 CHEMPAKASSERY, 'Jerusalem Pentecost', p. 121.

273 PATHIL, 'The Self-Understanding of the Church in India Today', p. 96. The reason for inculturation is neither to correct the mistakes of the early missionaries nor to stress the importance of Indian culture, but the theological reason of incarnation. See for details, M. OTT, 'Inculturation Revisited. New Challenges for the "Local" in the "Global"', in *Journal of Constructive Theology* 4, 1998, 1, p. 91.

274 D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Theology of Evangelization in the Indian Context*, Bangalore, NBCLC, 1984, p. 19. See also VAN LEEUWEN, *Fully Indian Authentically Christian*, p. 236.

Voices also could be heard among the theologians who consider the present efforts at inculturation as a watering down of Christian principles and values. Some of them consider inculturation as Hinduization and a promotion of a Hindu way of life thinly disguised as Christianity. Some others consider it as paganising the Church in India and compromising Christian ideals. Some people dismiss the whole movement for inculturation as “an artificial product of missionary sentimentalism”²⁷⁵.

2.1.3.3. Overview and Evaluation

We have now seen that Christianity had a two-phased origin in India. The Christianity that is known to the mainland Indians is the form that arrived in India in its second phase, which came with colonial power. We have seen that the Catholic Church has a very scanty presence in India today with Christianity accounting for a mere 2.3% of the population.

When we look at how Christianity in India is perceived, we have found that many Hindu intellectuals have a very negative opinion about the Church and its missionaries. People in general perceive Christianity as Western, anti-nationalistic, and institutional. The Indian theologians also agree that the people in general perceive Christianity in that manner. They feel that the Church lives on a borrowed identity and it has not yet become incarnated in India.

We have also noted that the Catholic Church herself was not pleased with her western identity and so we find the desire for inculturation. The Catholic Bishops' Conference through its various departments and offices has expressed this desire. The Federation of Asian Bishop's Conferences was also very much outspoken concerning the need for Asian Churches to be inculturated. The Indian theologians, both as a group under the banner of ITA and individually, have raised their voices for making the Church in India fully Indian and fully Christian at the same time.

We shall now see that the efforts for inculturation were present side-by-side with the very beginnings of the colonisation. Moreover, interestingly, that movement of inculturation was also led by Western missionaries. Colonisation and indigenisation could be considered as two sides of the same coin. We shall now see the efforts for inculturation of individuals, and the collective efforts of the Church.

2.2. Inculturation in the Area of Community Building in India

2.2.0. Introduction

²⁷⁵ GRANT, *God's people in India*, p. 39. See for more critical views on inculturation, S.M. MICHAEL, 'Christianity and Cultures Authentic in Dialogue. Beyond Relativism and Ethnocentrism', in *Indian Theological Studies* 15, 2003, 1, p. 58.

In this section, we shall make a survey of the efforts of inculturation carried out by individual members of the Church and the collective effort of the Church under the banner of the National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre (NBCLC). We shall focus our attention on the area of community building and see how much has been done in the past. However, before proceeding, we shall clarify the terms “Church” and “inculturation”.

2.2.1. *The Concepts of Church and Inculturation*

2.2.1.1. The Concept of Church

According to the Oxford Dictionary of Christian Faith the term “Church” is derived from the Greek *κυριακον* (thing) belonging to the Lord, which was applied originally to a church building²⁷⁶. However, the most frequent Greek term used for the Church in the New Testament is *εκκλησια* (*ecclesia*).²⁷⁷ Concerning the origin of the term Church, Joseph Ratzinger says, “In the New Testament the normal term for the Church is the word *εκκλησια*, which in the Old Testament denoted the assembly of the people through being summoned by the word of God. The term *εκκλησια*/Church is the New Testament modification and transformation of the Old Testament concept of the people of God”²⁷⁸. The first Christian community in Jerusalem called itself the “*εκκλησια* of God” (1Cor 15, 9; Gal 1, 13)²⁷⁹. In Greek, *εκκλησια* meant a public assembly of the political community. Also in Latin, *ecclesia*, from Greek *εκκλησια*, had an original meaning of “assembly, congregation, council”, literally “convocation”²⁸⁰. However, in many texts, including some important ones, the Septuagint had used *εκκλησια* to translate the Hebrew term *qahal*, the assembly before Yahweh of the Old Testament people of the covenant²⁸¹. In short, we can understand that “in calling their congregation an *εκκλησια* the early followers of Jesus indicated their sense of continuity with God’s chosen people”²⁸².

However, in the later period of the growth and development of the Church, the idea of the Church as people of God was not stressed anymore and a more institutional identity arose. The visible and institutional identity of the Church was given predominance to the extent that Robert Bellarmine compared the insti-

276 M.J.L. GUILLOU and others, ‘Church’, in F.L. CROSS (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Faith*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 346. However, the original expression for the Church was *κυριακον οικια* which means house or family of the Lord.

277 T. ENGELSVIKEN, ‘Church/Ecclesiology’, in J. CORRIE (ed.), *Dictionary of Mission Theology*, Nottingham, Inter-Varsity Press, 2007, p. 52.

278 J. RATZINGER, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics*, New York, St. Paul Publications, 1988, p. 18.

279 All the Biblical quotations in this research are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

280 ENGELSVIKEN, ‘Church/Ecclesiology’ pp. 52-53.

281 G. LOHFINK, *Jesus and Community*, London, SPCK, 1985, p. 77.

282 B.P. PRUSAK, *The Church Unfinished. Ecclesiology through Centuries*, New York, Paulist Press, 2004, p. 74. See also R. BOYD, *Khristadvaita. A Theology for India*, Madras, The Christian Literature Society, 1977, p. 287.

tutional church to the republic of Venice²⁸³. Still later, Church was seen as the perfect society. However, the Second Vatican Council, as we shall see, now re-captured the identity of the Church as the people of God.

The Concept of Church According to the Second Vatican Council

The Second Vatican Council through its two documents, The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen gentium*) and the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et spes*), gives several descriptions of Church such as mystery, people of God, the Body of Christ, the community of believers, a sign and sacrament for the world, the servant Church, and the praying Church. These documents do not promote a single image or metaphor as the central term to describe the Church²⁸⁴.

Kuncheria Pathil speaks of eight major changes or shifts of emphasis the Council made which together form a new paradigm for the theology of the Church²⁸⁵. They are the shifts from institution to mystery, hierarchy to people, papal primacy to episcopal collegiality, universal Church to local Churches, triumphant Church to pilgrim Church, one Catholic Church to many Christian Churches, one and the only true religion to plurality of religions, and ecclesiocentrism to the world and the kingdom of God.

However, immediately after the council no image captured the imagination of Catholics like that of the Church as the new people of God²⁸⁶. It was considered by the faithful that “the major understanding of the Church in the council’s teaching is that the Church is the people of God, and all the other understandings are secondary to this...”²⁸⁷. *Lumen gentium* had devoted a full chapter (2) to the idea of Church as people of God. In this understanding the role and place of the faithful is held high and the hierarchy is no more the centre of the Church, but “subordinate to the whole people of God”²⁸⁸. Thus, Church is seen first of all, as a pilgrim people on the way to the heavenly city,²⁸⁹ and is related to others. All peoples - Jews, Muslims, practitioners of other religious traditions, individual spiritual seekers, and men and women of good will are in some way related to the Church²⁹⁰.

283 R.R. GAILLARDETZ, *The Church in the Making. Lumen gentium, Christus Dominus, Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, New York, Paulist Press, 2006, p. 1.

284 H. RIKHOF, *The Concept of Church. A Methodological Inquiry into the Use of Metaphors in Ecclesiology*, London, Sheed and Ward, 1981, p. 65. Avery Dulles says that the New Testament is extremely luxuriant in its ecclesiological imagery. See A. DULLES, *Models of the Church. A Critical Assessment of the Church in All its Aspects*, Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1976, p. 17.

285 K. PATHIL, *Theology of the Church. New Horizons*, Bangalore, Dharmaram Publications, 2006, p. 101.

286 GAILLARDETZ, *The Church in the Making*, p. 88.

287 L. DOOHA, ‘The Church’, in M. GLAZIER & M. HELLWIG (eds.), *The Modern Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Minnesota, Michael and Glazier Book/ the Liturgical Press, 2004, p. 164.

288 C. BUTLER, *The Theology of Vatican II*, London, Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 1981, p. 71. See also PATHIL, *Theology of the Church*, pp. 35-38; J.R. DEVASAHAYAM, *Human Dignity in Indian Secularism and in Christianity*, Bangalore, Cleretian publications, 2007, p. 332.

289 V.-M. KÄRKKÄINEN, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology*, Illinois, InterVarsity Press, 2002, p. 28.

290 GAILLARDETZ, *Ecclesiology for a Global Church*, p. 51.

2.2.1.2. The Concept of Inculturation

The term inculturation is of a recent origin but the idea or the notion of inculturation is not anything new in the life and history of the Church. What is new is the term itself and the shift of emphasis that came with it²⁹¹. The Church grew through the centuries, inculturating itself to the culture of the people as it made progress, but many times without making a concrete and intentional effort to do so. Now we speak of inculturation that is done intentionally with a view to make the Church indigenous.

There is no consensus among scholars about who introduced the term to Christian theology. Aylward Shorter considers Joseph Masson as the first to introduce it into the Catholic discussion in 1962²⁹². The 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus held from 1974 to 1975 used the term inculturation several times in its texts²⁹³. However, the Catholic Church preferred to use the term “adaptation” in its official documents. It was in 1979 that the term found its place in the official church documents, when Pope John Paul II observed, “the term inculturation may be a neologism but it expresses very well one of the elements of the great mystery of incarnation”²⁹⁴.

Roughly, inculturation is defined as a process of integration of the Christian faith into local culture or cultures²⁹⁵. In other words, inculturation is the incarnation of the Gospel in native cultures and the introduction of these cultures into the life of the Church. Thus, we have two movements: one is from Gospel to culture and the other from culture to Gospel. Both these movements are to be found in inculturation and stressing one over the other is not ideal. Leonardo Doohan defines inculturation as “the effort of Christianity to be truly Catholic by adapting its message to new cultures. Sometimes the words such as accommodation or contextualization or indigenization are used to convey a two-fold movement of the faith - incarnating its values in cultures and baptising or Christianizing the cultures and values, drawing them into Christianity’s world view”²⁹⁶. The Yogyakarta Research Seminar on inculturation describes it as “the process by which an ecclesial community lives its Christian faith and experience within a given cultural context, in such a way that these not only find their expression in elements of the local culture, but also become a force that animates, reshapes and profoundly renews that culture, so as to create new patterns of communion and

291 F.A. OBORJI, *Concepts of Mission. The Evolution of Contemporary Missiology*, New York, Orbis Books, 2006, p. 18.

292 A. SHORTER, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, p. 10. See also K. PATHIL, *Trends in Indian Theology*, p. 135.

293 PATHIL, *Trends in Indian Theology*, p. 135.

294 JOHN PAUL II, quoted in A.J CHUPUNGO, *Liturgical Inculturation, Sacramentals, Religiosity, and Catechesis*, Minnesota, The Liturgical Press 1992, p. 26.

295 J. PINTO, ‘Mission as Inculturation’, in J. MATTAM & S. KIM (eds.), *Dimensions of Mission in India*, Bombay, St. Pauls, 1995, p. 157.

296 L. DOOHAN, ‘Inculturation’, p. 400.

communication within that culture and beyond it”²⁹⁷. Inculturation is more concretely defined by Shorter as “the on-going dialogue between faith and culture or cultures. More fully it is the creative and dynamic relationship between Christian message and a culture or cultures”²⁹⁸.

Moreover, we cannot think of a Christian message in a way that is completely devoid of any cultural elements. The Gospel presented to a particular culture is brought by someone from another particular culture. The second culture is challenged by the message and a dialogue takes place between the Gospel and the culture. In this process, both the Gospel and the culture are challenged and a new way of life emerges.

Here, we can see three dimensions in this inculturation²⁹⁹. The first dimension is that there is no pure and universal Gospel without any cultural elements. We cannot say that there is a kernel of the Gospel, which is packed, in a disposable, non-essential cultural husk³⁰⁰. However, the Gospel and the Christian life in the particular cultural category are brought by a missionary³⁰¹. That means the Gospel is already inculturated into a particular culture, and we cannot filter out a pure Gospel without cultural elements. It is not correct to presuppose that the essential message of Christianity is super-cultural or supra-contextual³⁰². In addition, there is no pure culture itself. The term culture in itself “is a notoriously slippery concept”³⁰³. Anthropologists nowadays consider cultures as not homogeneous but diverse. They consider that the cultural knowledge is shared by the members of the group, and there is also a great variety of interpretations within groups³⁰⁴. Culture, therefore, is not something static and homorganic, but ever changing and diverse.

In the second dimension, the recipient culture tries to discern and assimilate the essence of the Gospel and to express it in its own categories³⁰⁵. The recipient community has a role. It accepts the Gospel in its own categories and in its own way. The community, from its local context using its culture, expresses the faith authentically and creatively. A person from a different culture cannot dictate the direction and the extent of this assimilation. However, it is the local people who

297 Quoted in J. PINTO, *Inculturation Through Basic Communities*, Bangalore, Asian Trading Corporation, 1985, p. 13.

298 SHORTER, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, p. 11.

299 In his book *Christ and Culture*, H. Richard Niebuhr has described various understandings of the relationship between Christianity and culture. He analyses the various terms such as Christ ‘against’ ‘of’, and ‘above’ culture, as well as Christ ‘transforming’ and in ‘paradoxical’ relation to culture.

300 S. BEVANS, *Models of Contextual Theology*, New York, Orbis Books, 2003, p. 40.

301 PATHIL, *Trends in Indian Theology*, p. 137. See also W. ARIARAJAH, ‘Interreligious Dialogue as an Intercultural Encounter’, in M. FREDERIKS, M. DIJKSTRA & A. HOUTEPEN (eds.), *Towards an Intercultural Theology*, Zoetermeer, Mienema, 2003, p. 58; P.C. PHAN, *In Our Own Tongues*, New York, Orbis books, 2003, p. 6.

302 BEVANS, *Models of Contextual Theology*, p. 40.

303 SCHREITER, *The New Catholicity*, p. 29.

304 F. WIJSEN, ‘New Wine in Old Wineskins? Intercultural Theology Instead of Missiology’, in FREDERIKS, DIJKSTRA & HOUTEPEN (eds.), *Towards an Intercultural Theology*, p. 43.

305 PATHIL, *Trends in Indian Theology*, p.137. DAVID J. HESSELGRAVE describes the importance of culture in any form of cross cultural communication. He considers culture as the most formidable barrier in the missionary activity. See *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, pp. 67-86.

listen to the Gospel, respond to it, and express this response in worship, symbols, and ways of life, celebration etc., through their own linguistic and spiritual medium³⁰⁶. We do not exclude the role of the missionary or the expert, but the locus of inculturation here is the local community, which is on a mission to make the reign of God present its “locality” through liberative inter-religious engagement for the welfare of the all creation³⁰⁷.

In the third dimension, transformation occurs to both the Gospel and the culture, going beyond the current culture and the previous ways of understanding and living the Gospel³⁰⁸. Thus, the culture is transformed by getting a new spirit and vitality and orientation from the Gospel, and Christianity is, in turn, enriched upon entering a new cultural phase and region³⁰⁹. Hence, it is “the reciprocal and critical interaction between Christian faith and culture in a historical process”³¹⁰. This mutuality could be explained as “the integration of the Christian experience of a local Church into the culture of its people, in such a way that this experience not only expresses itself in elements of this culture, but becomes a force that animates, orientates, and innovates this culture so as to create a new unity and communion, not only within the culture in question but also as an enrichment of the Church universal”³¹¹.

Theological Basis for Inculturation

The Incarnation of the Word in Jesus Christ, which made him become the perfect human being and at the same time remain the perfect Divine Being, is considered the most important theological basis for inculturation³¹². Just as in incarnation the divine and the human becomes one in Jesus, so in inculturation the Gospel and culture is united to form a new community. “Incarnation, the most human mode of God’s presence in the world, is the primary motivation as well as a radical paradigm for inculturation”³¹³. In the similar way, as Jesus assumed the entire human nature, an entire Jewish nature, the Christian message in the process of inculturation should assume all the good and positive elements in a culture so that the people of that culture can respond to it in faith³¹⁴. We can very well say that this is a process by which the Gospel message penetrates into every culture with-

306 AMALADOSS, ‘Inculturation and Evangelization’, pp. 152-153.

307 FAPA III, p. 218.

308 PHAN, *In Our Own Tongues*, p. 6.

309 PATHIL, *Trends in Indian Theology*, p. 137. See also D.S. AMALORPAVADASS, *Gospel and Culture*, p. 14.

310 SHORTER, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, p. 13. See also R.L. RAJA, ‘Inculturation of the Biblical Message’, in J. PATHRAPANKAL & E. EYNICKAL (eds.), *The International Bible Commentary*, Bangalore, Theological Publications in India, 2004, p. 347.

311 A. ROEST CROLLIUS, ‘Inculturation. Newness and Ongoing Process’, in J.M. WALIGGO, A. ROEST CROLLIUS, T. NKERAMHIGO, & J. MUTISO-MBINDA (eds.), *Inculturation. It’s Meaning and Urgency*, Kampala, St. Paul Publications, 1986, p. 43.

312 *Ad gentes* 22.

313 RAJA, ‘Inculturation of the Biblical Message’, p. 347. See also M. DHAVAMONY, *Christian Theology of Inculturation*, Rome, Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1997, pp. 89-93; A. CHUPUNGO, *Cultural Adaptation of the Liturgy*, New York, Paulist Press, 1982, p. 58.

314 PINTO, *Inculturation Through Basic Communities*, p. 14.

out compromising the identity of both the culture and the Gospel, but, at the same time, is mutually challenging and enriching. Therefore, it implies that the incarnation theology must guide the process of inculturation³¹⁵.

Moreover, as Pedro Arrupe says, “the theological principle is that Christ is the one and only saviour and saves only what he assumes to himself. Hence, Christ must assume in his body (church) all cultures, purifying them and removing everything which is contrary to his spirit, thus saving them without destroying them”³¹⁶. Therefore, every culture has the right to be assumed into the body of Christ. Jesus was God and man at the same time, born as a Jew, spoke and lived as Jew. If the people around him were to understand him, he had to speak like them. Thus, inculturation will allow the Gospel to incarnate fully into every culture thereby every culture becomes his body.

Kuncheria Pathil adds the idea of death and resurrection to the idea of incarnation. “In this inculturation process”, he says, “what happens is an incarnation, which calls for a *kenosis*, self-emptying, death and resurrection - a *kenosis* and death of the culture of the evangelizer, a death to the distorted and sinful elements in the culture of the evangelized and their resurrection into a new life”³¹⁷. Like the *kenosis* of Christ (Phil 2, 6-11), in inculturation there is a death of the culture of the evangelizer and a resurrection of a new form of Christian community. This view helps the missionary not to push for an arrogant form of inculturation or cultural imposition³¹⁸. It also warns the missionary not to indulge in any artificial accommodation for an immediate result. It warns the missionary that what he brings in is not a wholly supra-cultural Gospel, but already an inculturated one.

2.2.2. *Efforts for Inculturation in the Area of Community Building by Some Individuals*

Though the term inculturation is of a recent origin, we can see the efforts for inculturation in the works and lives of many pioneers of Indian theology even as early as the 16th century. The first clear initiative for inculturation is seen in the lives of western missionaries themselves. Later, the established practice of inculturation is found in the works of indigenous Christians.

The efforts for intentional inculturation in the area of community building became widespread as an enterprise in the field of mission and evangelization after the Second Vatican Council. However, in India, we have some individuals who ventured into this area of inculturation even as early as the 16th century. We shall select some of the important individuals who could be considered as pioneers of inculturation in the Indian Church. We have selected only Catholic theo-

315 OBORJI, *Concepts of Mission*, p. 111.

316 Quoted in M. DHAVAMONY, *Christian Theology of Inculturation*, Roma, Editrice Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 1997, p. 91.

317 PATHIL, *Trends in Indian Theology*, pp. 137-138.

318 S. MONDITHOKA, ‘Inculturation’, in J. CORRIE (ed.), *Dictionary of Mission Theology*, Nottingham, InterVarsity Press, 2007, p. 181.

logians and not included Protestant theologians and those who did not join any form of church. We have also tried to pick them up from different ages and areas as representatives of the time.

2.2.2.1. Robert de Nobili (1577-1656)

Robert De Nobili was an Italian missionary in the early 17th century who was much ahead of his contemporaries in his effort to evangelize. He is considered the first missionary in India who could accept the importance of Indian culture for the people of India. During the 17th century missionary (mostly the Portuguese) activity in India, most of the missionaries had a negative attitude towards Indian culture and religions. They believed in their cultural superiority and that Christianity was the only true religion and “all other faiths being but darkness, and power of Satan”³¹⁹. The role of Robert de Nobili is very important due to his sharp contrast with the policy of most of his contemporaries³²⁰. It was a time when most of the missionaries identified themselves with the interests of their king and the culture of their home nation, and were seen as interested in spreading the western form of Christianity³²¹. However, Robert de Nobili accepted the Indian customs and way of life³²². He learned the Indian languages and read the Indian scriptures. He was the first European missionary to acquire first-hand knowledge of Sanskrit and read the Hindu scriptures, the Vedas and the Vedanta in their originals³²³. He discovered the spiritual treasures and cultural heritage of the country and endured the stress and strain to resist the colonial imperialism and resisted the imposition of western practices and traditions on India³²⁴.

He aimed at the conversion of the highest caste, the Brahmins. He told them that they need not change their customs. Instead, he followed them to the extent of not touching or even baptising non-Brahmins³²⁵. His great achievement was the adaptation of Hindu customs and ceremonies in Christian living³²⁶. He told his colleague missionaries, “Just as we have changed our dress, language, food and habits... we may also change the colour of our faces and become like those

319 T. LING, *Karl Marx and Religion*, London/ Basingstoke, The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1980, p. 62. See also T.E. NORMAN (ed.), *Classic Texts in Mission & World Christianity*, New York, Orbis Books, 1998, p. 44.

320 De Nobili used the example of the St. Thomas Christians of Kerala in his policy of adaptation to win over the Brahmins. See for more details, F. THONIPPARA, ‘St. Thomas Christians. The First Indigenous Church of India’, in R.E. HELDLUND (ed.), *Christianity is Indian. The Emergence of an Indigenous Community*, Delhi, ISPCK, 2000, p. 60. The important writings of Robert de Nobili are *Gnanopadesam* (Teaching of Knowledge), *Gnana Sancheevi* (Spiritual Medicine) and *Punar Janma Akshepam* (Refutation of Re-birth).

321 KOODAPUZHA, *Christianity in India*, p. 183. See also J. KAVUNKAL, ‘Culture and Mission. Colonialistic Times and Beyond’, in J. MATTAM & K.C. MARAK (eds.), *Missiological Approaches in India*, Bombay, St. Pauls Publications, 1999, pp. 33-35.

322 The similar type of missionary approach is seen at that time in China by Matteo Ricci (1552-1610).

323 SHORTER, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, p. 160.

324 KOODAPUZHA, *Christianity in India*, p. 183.

325 S.H. MOFFETT, *A History of Christianity in Asia, Vol.11 1500 to 1900*, New York, Orbis Books, 2005, p. 21

326 PINTO, *Inculturation through Basic Communities*, p. 89.

with whom we live”³²⁷. He succeeded in building a community comprising the high caste Hindus. However, he compromised with the Hindu caste system³²⁸, which meant accepting the inequalities in the society as God-given and refusing to treat the poorest in terms of equality, violating the teaching of Jesus³²⁹. For compromising with the teaching of Jesus on charity and brotherhood, Robert de Nobili was criticised by the Church.

2.2.2.2. Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya (1861-1907)

Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya was a Brahmin from Bengal who came under the influence of Christianity from the Scottish General Assembly’s Institution in Calcutta where he studied. His uncle, Kali Charan Banerji, who had accepted Christianity, also influenced him³³⁰. Upadhyaya was first converted to Anglicanism in 1891, and later in the same year he became a member of the Roman Catholic Church. Thereafter, he lived like an Indian monk switching over to saffron clothes, walking barefooted, and wearing a cross around his neck. He called himself a Hindu-Catholic. “We are Hindus as far as our physical and mental constitution is concerned, but in regard to our immortal souls, we are Catholics. We are Hindu-Catholics”³³¹. He was deeply attached to all that was good in the Hindu tradition. He believed that the Christian religion, when spread beyond the confines of Palestine and came face to face with the Greco-Roman culture, gave birth to theologians who established a synthesis between Greek thought and the Christian faith. Similarly, he felt the need in India for a synthesis between the non-dualist form of Indian philosophical and religious thought and Catholic thought³³².

Upadhyaya believed that Hinduism and Christianity were not mutually exclusive. He made an important distinction between two aspects of Hinduism, one consisting of rules regarding social life, the other aspect pointing to a way of salvation. The Christian religion, he argued, was essentially a way toward union with God, a way of salvation. Hinduism on the other hand was, for him, a social organization or a culture, which left its door open to its members to opt for any way of salvation that suited them best. Therefore, Upadhyaya felt that Hinduism left him free to profess the creed that appealed to him. He was convinced that it

327 Quoted in MOFFETT, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, p. 21.

328 PATHIL, *Trends in Indian Theology*, p. 28.

329 P. JENKINS, *The Next Christendom. The Coming of Global Christianity*, Oxford etc., Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 30.

330 BOYD, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, p. 63. Upadhyaya founded a Catholic *āśram* on the banks of Narmada River near Jabalpur and lived with three other Brahmins. They begged for their food, led an austere life and spent time in prayer, study and contemplation. See for details, J. RAJAN, *Bede Griffiths and Sanyasa*, Bangalore, Asian Trading Corporation, 1997, pp. 80-82.

331 Upadhyaya, quoted in M.M. THOMAS, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*, Madras, The SCM Press, 1969, p. 112.

332 A. KALLIATH, ‘Brahmabandhab Upadhyay. An Evoking Parable of Christian Vocation’, in *Word and Worship* 41, 2008, 6, pp. 383-384.

was possible to be a Hindu and a Christian at the same time³³³. Hence, he adopted the saffron robe and the life style of an Indian Hindu monk. He wanted to establish a community that was socially and culturally Hindu and spiritually Christian. Upadhyaya claimed Christianity to be the fulfilment of Hinduism. He then reinterpreted many Hindu tenets³³⁴. He tried to articulate the Christian faith in terms of Hindu philosophical systems³³⁵. He worked for an Indian Church with an Indian liturgy and Indian theology. His contribution in the explanation of the doctrine of the trinity as *saccidānanda*³³⁶ and the doctrine of creation as *māyā*³³⁷ is important. "He became convinced that one could be an *advaitin* in philosophy and a Christian by faith"³³⁸. However, his initiative to begin an Indian *āśram* at Jabalpur was met with opposition from the church authorities. Upadhyaya's theological vision was not acceptable for the church at that time which estranged him from the Catholic Church.

2.2.2.3. Abhishiktananda (1910-1973)

The French Benedictine monk Henri le Saux was born in Brittany, France in 1910. He became a Benedictine novice in 1930 and made his religious profession in 1931. He left France and came to India in 1948 as a Benedictine monk intending to Christianize India. However, slowly he was drawn to the spiritual riches of India and his encounter with Ramana Maharshi³³⁹ made a profound influence on his whole life³⁴⁰. He collaborated with Jules Monchanin, another French priest, in establishing an *āśram* at Shantivanam, Tamil Nadu. In 1950 the Satcidananda *āśram* and a religious community was founded, and Henri le Saux took the name *Svāmī Abhishiktananda*³⁴¹.

He spent the rest of his life seeking to integrate the *advaitic* (non-dualistic) experience with his Christian belief. He found a similarity in the vision of the Indian seers when they spoke "I am Brahman" (*aham brāhmāsmi*) and the call and vision of Moses on the Mount Horeb³⁴². He realized that the *Upāṇiṣadic* experience has nothing to do with Hinduism or any religion, but is the basic human

333 BOYD, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, p. 68.

334 *Ibid.* p. 92.

335 A.E. MCGRATH, *An introduction to Christianity*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1997, p. 352.

336 *Saccidānanda* is a Sanskrit word for the triune God, which means Absolute Existence (*sat*), Absolute Knowledge (*cit*), and Absolute Bliss (*ānanda*).

337 *Māyā* in general means illusion. But the doctrine of *māyā* is very broad and it has several meanings.

338 H. STAFFNER, *The Significance of Jesus Christ in Asia*, Anand, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1985, p.99.

339 Ramana Maharshi was an inspiring sage who lived on Arunachala, a holy mountain 187 kilometres from Chennai, South India. He was born on December 30, 1879 and attained enlightenment at the age of 16 and spent the rest of his time on the hills of Arunachala in silence. He was considered a great sage and Guru and people from all over India came to have his blessings and *darśan* (vision). On April 14, 1950 he attained eternal liberation. He was known as the silent sage whose advaitic teaching, presence and gaze changed the life of many people. The devotees including those from the west even today come to meditate in silence in rooms and caves in the hills of Arunachala.

340 ABHISHIKTANANDA, *The Secret of Arunachala*, New Delhi, ISPCK, 1979, pp. 1-18

341 A. MOOKENTHOTTAM, *Indian Theological Tendencies. Approaches and Problems for Further Research as Seen in the Works of Some Leading Indian Theologians*, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 1978, p. 53.

342 MOOKENTHOTTAM, *Indian Theological Tendencies*, p. 55.

search for the Ultimate and the response of the Ultimate to the human soul³⁴³. He considered the Prologue of the St. John's Gospel and the Upanishads as parallels that lead one into the full mystery of God. For him they are also a proof of the unity of human spirit, underlying the differences of culture and intellect, which is manifested whenever it transcends those particular conditions that constrict and limit it, and in realizing its true self simultaneously discovers the very mystery of God, its source³⁴⁴.

He was attracted to the non-dualist experience of the sages who starting out from their everyday experience of the world of senses, and ascending, by means of a progressive series of subtle correspondences, through ever higher levels of being, at last in their own inner depths reaching the transforming bliss. He invited Christians to this experience saying that as long as he (the Christian) looks upon God as "another" in the sense in which his neighbour is "other" to him, as long as for him Jesus too is "another" and he sees the divine person also as "other" both to him and among themselves, he has not begun to understand anything either of himself or of God. The ultimate mystery lies at the very heart of non-duality³⁴⁵.

He has written extensively on Indian spirituality and interreligious encounter. His books include *The Secret of Arunachala, Towards the Renewal of the Indian Church, The Further Shore, The Church in India, Hindu Christian Meeting Point, The Mountain of the Lord: A Pilgrimage to Gangotri, Guru and Disciple* and *Saccidananda: A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience*. These writings and his life show a kind of trans-cultural understanding of spirituality and religion. "The outcome of Abhishiktananda's reflections leads to an understanding in which one is left with the feeling that the philosophy and theology of the Hindu mystical tradition are held as equal to, though sometimes in tension with the Christian tradition"³⁴⁶.

For him, the Hindu-Christian meeting point is not anywhere outside. It is in the depths of their spiritual experience that the Christians and Hindus will be able to understand each other. He believed that it is not on the level of conceptualized and formulated truth that religions meet but in the experiential level of the heart. He wanted Christians to recognise the spiritual riches of India and to integrate them into their lives. During the last years of his life, he spent several months in silence in Rishikesh and died in Indore, India in 1973.

2.2.3. The Collective Effort of the Church under the Banner of NBCLC

Soon after the Second Vatican Council, the bishops in India established the NBCLC for guiding the efforts for inculturation³⁴⁷. The main thrusts of the centre

343 ABHISHIKTANANDA, *The Future Shore*, New Delhi, ISPCK, 1975, p. 99.

344 ABHISHIKTANANDA, *Hindu-Christian Meeting Point*, New Delhi, ISPCK, 1969 p. 78.

345 ABHISHIKTANANDA, *Hindu-Christian Meeting Point*, p. 93.

346 COLLINS, *Christian Inculturation in India*, p. 89.

347 See more details about the centre in 2.1.3.1.

were inculturation, socio-political awareness, and inter-religious dialogue³⁴⁸. Drawing up a long-term programme of renewal, the NBCLC gave top priority to adaptation and inculturation³⁴⁹. The means adopted for this purpose involved organizing several types of all-India meetings and seminars as part of their service for animation, training, and formation. These all-India meetings and seminars were conducted for bishops, religious superiors, priests, nuns, catechists, and lay people. The meetings and seminars had in their very structure and methodology some orientation for indigenization. Almost all the seminars had an initiation into both the social and cultural reality of India, the relevance of the mission in that context,³⁵⁰ and devoted some time for bringing home to the participants the right to and need for inculturation in all the aspects of Christian life, i.e., worship, spirituality, theology, and life-style.

Between 1974 and 1984, the NBCLC organized ten ten-day prayer seminars, most of them attended by more than 300 participants³⁵¹. These prayer seminars were intended to acquaint the participants with the themes of the Second Vatican Council and to encourage and introduce them to the field of inculturation. Through these seminars, around 3,000 persons came, for the first time, into somewhat systematic contact with Vatican II renewal, experiential prayer, and inculturation³⁵².

The centre found that the leaders of the church needed to be motivated to encourage and support inculturation. Therefore, the centre organized two seminars exclusively for bishops and two exclusively for major superiors of women religious. The centre then conducted leadership courses for the local superiors of men and women religious. A total of 1,535 local superiors received a basic formation in Vatican II spirituality and leadership³⁵³. The centre also conducted two ten-day seminars on Indian Christian spirituality. A total of 1,830 people participated for the lay leadership seminar in 11 seminars during 1977 to 1982³⁵⁴.

Besides these, the NBCLC formed a mobile team to be at the service of the diocesan priests and missionaries in the field. The mobile team conducted 74 diocesan seminars in various dioceses for 5,500 participants lasting for four or five days³⁵⁵. The centre also conducted 11 short-term intensive courses for the leaders both religious and lay, at the diocesan level. The NBCLC conducted four research seminars for the development of an authentic Indian theology.

Though not under the direct guidance of the centre, taking inspiration from the overall atmosphere, there were several other attempts made in the field of inculturation. The translation of the whole Bible into almost all the major languages of India was successfully completed. Many priests and religious replaced their

348 NBCLC, *National Biblical Catechetical Liturgical Centre*, Bangalore, NBCLC, 1971, p. 3.

349 VAN LEEUWEN, *Fully Indian Authentically Christian*, p. 247.

350 *Ibid.* p. 105.

351 *Ibid.* p. 110.

352 *Ibid.* p. 111.

353 *Ibid.* p. 118.

354 *Ibid.* p. 121.

355 *Ibid.* pp. 123-126.

cassocks and habits with native ways of dressing³⁵⁶. Indian forms of meditation, *yōgā*, the reading of Hindu scriptures, and the singing of *bhajans* were made part of personal and community prayers. Some religious congregations shifted their formation houses to rural areas and made the local languages the medium of conversation and instruction³⁵⁷.

Since liturgical inculturation was thought of as the most important field in view of inculturation, many efforts have been made to inculturate the liturgy³⁵⁸. As an outcome of the above-mentioned meetings and deliberations, the process of liturgical indigenization was to be introduced in phases³⁵⁹. The first phase was the introduction of minor adaptations that came to be called as the 12 Points of Adaptation approved by the Catholic Bishops Conference of India and the Holy See in 1969³⁶⁰. The 12 points are:

1. T
the posture during the mass, both for the priests and the faithful may be adapted to the local usage; that is sitting on the floor (called squatting mass), standing and the like - footwear may be removed also.
2. G
enuflections may be replaced by the *añjali hastā* (a profound bow of the head with joined hands on the forehead).
3. A
pañcāṅg praṇām (homage of 5 organs of the body) by both priest and faithful can take place before the liturgy of the word, as part of the penitential rite, and at the conclusion of the anaphora.
4. T
the kissing of the objects may be adapted to local custom, that is, touching the object with one's hand and bringing the hands to one's eyes or forehead.
5. T
the kiss of peace could be given by the exchange of the *añjali hastā* or by the placing of hands of the giver between the hands of the recipient.
6. I
incense could be used more often in liturgical services. The receptacle could be the simple incense bowl with handle.
7. T
the vestments could be simplified. A single tunic-type chasuble with a stole (*aṅgavastrā*) could replace the traditional vestments of the Roman rite.

356 Women religious congregations changed their habit for *sāri*.

357 S. ANAND, 'Inculturation in India. Yesterday Today and Tomorrow', p. 24.

358 For the details about the various committees and sub committees and the procedures, see MICHAEL, *Liturgical Renewal in India*, pp. 25-30.

359 AMALORPAVADASS, *Gospel and Culture*, p. 73.

360 The approval was collected by a ballot. For the procedure followed, see VAN LEEUWEN, *Fully Indian Authentically Christian*, pp. 70-71.

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|-----|---|---|
| 8. | he corporal could be replaced by a tray (<i>thālī</i> or <i>thambūla thattu</i>) of fitting material. | T |
| 9. | il lamps could be used instead of candles. | O |
| 10. | he preparatory rite of the Mass may include: | T |
| a. | he presentation of gifts | t |
| b. | he welcome of the celebrant in an Indian way, e.g., with a single <i>ārtī</i> (the waving of light or incense), washing of hands, etc. | t |
| c. | he lighting of the lamp | t |
| d. | he greeting of peace among the faithful as a sign of reconciliation. | t |
| 11. | n the <i>Oratio fidelium</i> some spontaneity may be permitted with regard to both its structure and the formulation of the intentions. However, care should be taken to maintain the universal aspect of the Church. | I |
| 12. | n the offertory rite and at the conclusion of the anaphora the Indian form of worship may be integrated, that is, double or triple “ <i>ārtī</i> ” of flowers, incense, and light ³⁶¹ . | I |

As a part of the first phase of liturgical inculturation, these 12 points were, for the first time, incorporated in the liturgy at the All-India Seminar on the “Church in India Today” in 1969, which had over 600 participants from different parts of the country³⁶². Though the participants welcomed the liturgy with enthusiasm, there soon arose controversy from many quarters. The objections about these 12 Points of Adaptation were published in the catholic and secular press³⁶³. “The controversy came from mainly three quarters: from debate in the form of ‘letters to the editor’ in the Catholic weekly ‘Examiner’, from a few bishops who doubted the juridical validity of the bishops’ decision by postal ballot, and from a few influential lay people”³⁶⁴.

In the next General Meeting of the CBCI in January 1970, the bishops pointed out the optional character of the 12 Points of Adaptation. Moreover, in the same year in March, “Cardinal Gracias himself as the president of the CBCI issued an official statement on the liturgy, in which he affirmed the juridical validity of the procedure followed, stressed the facultative character of the adaptations

361 See for details AMALORPAVADASS, *Gospel and Culture*, p. 73.

362 MICHAEL, *Liturgical Renewal in India*, p. 34

363 AMALORPAVADASS, *Gospel and Culture*, p. 77.

364 MICHAEL, *Liturgical Renewal in India*, p. 34.

and emphasized that they were only to be introduced after proper catechesis³⁶⁵. In July of the same year, Mgr. Annibale Bugnini, the secretary of the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship approved the decision-making procedure of the CBCI in a letter addressed to Mr. L.G. Stuart, the secretary of the Catholic Association of Bengal. He also appealed to all to put an end to the controversy³⁶⁶.

Thus, the first phase of inculturation in which the 12 Points of Adaptation was to be introduced met with controversy. There were questions regarding the 12 points themselves and the legal procedure. The decision-making procedure was finally approved as legal and correct by the authorities.

The second phase of inculturation aimed at composing an original prayer formula, inclusion of readings and chants from non-Christian scriptures, composition of an Indian anaphora, and the formation of an Indian order of mass. It also envisaged an adaptation of the baptismal rite of Indian initiation ceremonies, integration of the rite of matrimony with local marriage customs and ceremonies, Christian funerals with the funeral customs of the society, regions, and religions, and Christian celebration of Indian festivals, whether national, social, or religious³⁶⁷. A sub-commission was already set up for this task in 1968 and the commission went ahead with its work despite the controversy regarding the first phase. The first draft of the "Indian Order of Mass" was ready by 1970, which was circulated to the members and consulters of the CBCI Commission for Liturgy³⁶⁸. The suggestions of the members and the experts were used to revise the text and a final Indian anaphora was composed and the text presented to the General Meeting of CBCI in 1972. However, due to the lack of a required majority this was not forwarded to Rome for approval but published in a book meant for private circulation, "New Order of the Mass for India"³⁶⁹.

At this stage in 1975, Cardinal Knox, the Prefect for the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, asked the CBCI, "to put an end to certain liturgical practices connected with indigenization"³⁷⁰. His letter specifically forbade the use of Indian anaphora and the readings of non-biblical scriptures in the liturgy. The CBCI chairman of the commission for liturgy sent a letter to all bishops and major superiors of religious congregations asking them to stop all unauthorized experimentation and liberties in liturgical inculturation, the use of the Indian anaphora, and the use of readings from non-biblical scriptures in the liturgy³⁷¹.

365 VAN LEEUWEN, *Fully Indian Authentically Christian*, p. 73.

366 For the details of the letter, see AMALORPAVADASS, *Gospel and Culture*, p. 79.

367 AMALORPAVADASS, *Gospel and Culture*, p. 74.

368 MICHAEL, *Liturgical Renewal in India*, p. 39.

369 *Ibid.* p. 40.

370 VAN LEEUWEN, *Fully Indian Authentically Christian*, p. 79. See also T.K. JOHN, 'An Ecclesiology in a Religiously Pluralistic India', in G.VAN LEEUWEN (ed.), *Searching for an Indian Ecclesiology*, Bangalore, ATC, 1984, p. 246.

371 VAN LEEUWEN, *Fully Indian Authentically Christian*, p. 79

Though it was not clear whether the 12 Points of Adaptation approved by Rome could be continued or not, in effect, all liturgical renewal came to a standstill³⁷².

This situation remained for a long time without any further steps. The CBCI could not go on with the same eagerness and enthusiasm, though they continued their efforts for liturgical inculturation, but that had to change its course. Hence, together with some guidelines for liturgical adaptation, the General Meeting of the CBCI in 1979 gave the power to the Regional Bishops' Conferences regarding liturgical inculturation. "The greatest and most far reaching step of this CBCI meeting was that the CBCI shifted the decision-making power regarding liturgical matters from itself to the Regional Councils of Bishops"³⁷³. Now the role of the NBCLC was reduced to just giving support by seminars, courses, and training.

The latest instruction from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacrament, *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, has not given any positive support for the efforts of inculturation in India. However, there was another Indian order for mass for the Syrian Catholic tradition (St. Thomas Christians), which also had to be stopped due to the official ban on the liturgical inculturation. Nonetheless, this Indian Eucharistic liturgy is celebrated at Kurisumala *āśram* (Kerala), originally created by members of a religious congregation called the CMI (Carmelites of Mary Immaculate) in 1969. "Composed by Malayalees [people who speak Malayalam as their mother tongue] in their own language, it adopted boldly and with considerable success not only the religious symbolism of India but also the most expressive thought patterns of its sacrificial worship"³⁷⁴.

2.2.4. Evaluation of the Efforts

The Church in India is indebted to the pioneers for their initiatives and insights. They have given Christian theological vocabulary to the Indian Church. They have displayed ways and means of accepting Indian customs and traditions into Christian theology. We could consider them as individuals who responded to the need of the time and as the sons of their time. All three, De Nobili, Upadhyaya, and Abhishiktananda accepted the importance of the Hindu customs and way of life for the Church in India. They not only considered the customs of Hindu religion as good, but also lived like Hindu monks. All three had a philosophical approach and wanted to bring the Christian faith to Indian culture by using the categories of *Vedānta* philosophy.

De Nobili and Abhishiktananda were Europeans by birth and came to India as missionaries. De Nobili had a positive attitude only to Hindu customs, but not to the Hindu religion. At a time when his contemporaries considered everything

372 An Original Eucharistic Prayer for India was prepared later and with the consent of CCBI (Conference of Catholic Bishops of India, i.e. the conference of Episcopal body of Latin Rite) sent to Rome in 1992 for approval. But it was not approved by the Rome.

373 VAN LEEUWEN, *Fully Indian Authentically Christian*, p. 87.

374 ACHARYA, 'A Monastic Experiment', p. 120. What is in parenthesis is added by the present researcher.

that was Hindu as pagan and to be destroyed, he accepted the Hindu social customs and lived like one of them. He founded his own *āśram* and lived like a Hindu Brahmin in order to win over Indian people and bring them to Christianity. It was, for him, a missionary method to evangelize the Indians. He accepted the caste system, maintained it, and did not allow the Gospel to challenge the caste discrimination.

Abhishiktananda was attracted to both Indian customs and the Hindu religious and spiritual wealth. He would often visit the Hindu *āśram* and live as a true seeker and preferred to spend much time in the hills away from the Christian *āśram* of which he was a co-founder. He was a mystic and found that mysticism was the meeting point of religions. In his mystical experience he found himself Hindu and Christian at the same time. He found the enrichment of Christian experience by the inner experience of Hinduism.

Upadhyaya was an Indian Hindu by birth and accepted the Christian faith. He wanted the Indian Church to shed all that was western and accept the social and cultural garb of India. He considered Christianity as the fulfilment of Hinduism. Upadhyaya wanted to reconcile pure Hinduism and pure Christianity. He called himself a “Catholic Hindu”. He remained culturally Hindu and Christian at heart. He made an important contribution by distinguishing between the cultural Hinduism and Hinduism as a religious truth. Initially, he wanted to settle down in a monastery but later became more like a wandering monk. During the last stages of his life, he lived as if he was not bound by any religion but was committed to Indian customs.

When we observe the contribution of these pioneers, it is certain that they all had a deep knowledge of the Hindu religion and scriptures. They were genuinely interested in living a life, which was both Indian and Christian at the same time. They chose a spiritual or religious life, which was in line with the religious spirit of India. However, we have to admit that what they lived was not something possible for an ordinary person. It was meant for a monk or a religiously gifted person. Ordinary people remained at a distance from such an interpretation or such a life.

It must be noted that we have in the NBCLC a centre devoted to head the process of inculturation of the Church in India. This centre founded and supported by the CBCI, the highest body of Catholics in India, is an indication of their desire for inculturation of the Church. The centre has succeeded in organizing many seminars and courses, which was vital in making people aware of the need for inculturation. The numerous participants who were animated by the centre, speak about the tireless effort the centre undertook and the success it achieved.

With the guidance of the NBCLC, the liturgical renewal gained momentum in India, hitherto a nation liturgically asleep³⁷⁵. It succeeded in presenting a model for liturgy, an Indian order, though not acceptable to all the bishops and lacking the majority required to be sent to Rome for approval. Chupungco endorses the

375 VAN LEEUWEN, *Fully Indian Authentically Christian*, p. 94.

importance of this attempt as he notes, “the attempt acquires a greater significance in the light of its methodological approach. Besides replacing traditional Roman rites with equivalent native elements, it develops in details some parts of the order of mass”³⁷⁶. We can say that the attempt made by the NBCLC for an Indian order of mass was one of great achievement. It can be seen as a genuine effort to make the liturgy Indian. “In reality [it is] the first significant attempt after the Council to adapt the order of mass”³⁷⁷.

Nonetheless, the attempt of the NBCLC for inculturation in liturgy was useful only to create an Indian atmosphere of worship by adopting some Indian postures and gestures. As Amalorpavadass, then the national secretary to the NBCLC, himself claims, “It is meant to create an Indian atmosphere of worship through postures, gestures, objects and symbols typical of Indian religious tradition”³⁷⁸. Therefore, it has done just that and nothing more. It had not become really Indian at heart. The changes were more peripheral³⁷⁹. It was limited to the acceptance of some Indian objects and elements such as vestments, decorations, forms of homage and veneration.

It is important to have an atmosphere of Indian culture for the liturgy and that the peripheral changes are the points of departures for deeper inculturation. However, when the attempt itself is limited to the periphery the result will be limited to peripheral changes³⁸⁰. The question comes up as to how can we have an Indian Liturgy when the attempt at inculturation was only on the level of external adaptations?

The ritual elements and postures introduced were considered as “universally accepted in the country”³⁸¹. However, these elements and postures were mostly from the *Brahminical* culture and were opposed by the lower sections of the society. Many of the elements in the 12 Points were not from the traditions of tribals, *Dalits*, and other groups. The *añjalī hastā* (point 2), the *pañcāṅg praṇām* (point 3), the incense (point 6), and the vestment (point 7) are clearly not from those groups of indigenous people. Not only those points but the overall tendency has been to confine the inculturation attempts only to the symbols and meanings culled from the Sanskrit culture³⁸². India is a vast land and a multi-religious and multicultural society. “The multi-religious context called for plurality in liturgical adaptation”³⁸³.

376 A.J. CHUPUNGO, *Liturgies of the Future*, New York, Paulist Press, 1989, p. 88.

377 *Ibid.* p. 88. What is in parenthesis is added by the present researcher.

378 AMALORPAVADASS, *Gospel and Culture*, p. 81.

379 T.K. JOHN, ‘An Ecclesiology in a Religiously Pluralistic India’, p. 246.

380 Later an Indian anaphora was sent to Rome with the approval of CBCI, which Rome did not approve. It did not have anything original, as is clear from the report of Archbishop Angelo Geraldo which says that in the Eucharistic prayers submitted to them they (Rome) found hardly anything original. See MICHAEL, *Liturgical Renewal in India*, p. 50.

381 Quoted in CHUPUNGO, *Liturgies of the Future*, p. 88.

382 J. KAVUNKAL, ‘Culture Mission. Colonialistic Times and Beyond’, in M. JOSEPH & M. KRICKWIN (eds.), *Missiological Approaches in India. Retrospect and Prospect*, Mumbai, St. Pauls Publications, 1999, p. 45.

383 J. DUPUIS, ‘Dialogue in India Today’, in CORNILLE & NECKEBROUCK (eds.), *A Universal Faith?*, p. 31.

Even in relation to the high culture, the attempt was not effective enough. There were only some decorative elements, which did not make the core ritual meaningful and relevant to the people³⁸⁴. Moreover, even some Christians look on them as “Hinduization” rather than “Indianization”³⁸⁵.

Inculturation was mostly understood in a limited sense and the efforts were limited to liturgy and architecture³⁸⁶. All the other aspects were rather neglected. Inculturation for many Christians meant primarily the cultivation of indigenous traditions of worship. Though liturgy is central to Christian life, the other aspects also need attention. As Felix Wilfred says, the efforts were oriented to give an anthropological and cultural colouring to an already well-defined theological reality. The real question is to develop an understanding and praxis of ecclesiality that will have the anthropological and the cultural as its base rather than as its consequence³⁸⁷.

The local community was neglected in the process of inculturation. The inculturation was thought of, and worked out, as a process of expertise and the community was not involved in it. It was initiated and run by the body of experts at the national level by a national organism. It was the result of academic endeavours³⁸⁸. Inculturation of liturgy or inculturation as such has to take place from the local community of the dedicated faithful. “It cannot work with blue prints prepared elsewhere. It has to be the local communities’ faith response in a particular cultural context”³⁸⁹. In addition, the symbols and rites should come from the people rather than expert committees³⁹⁰. Inculturation thus attempted in India was not the outcome of the faith expressed by the local community. The bishops of Asia also acknowledge this saying, “at times, our efforts towards inculturation have remained too theoretical and failed to resonate with the people at the grass-roots level, sometimes these efforts have become one-sided (e.g., over-stress on Sanskritization in India) or have ignored or discarded the traditions (art, music, dance, festivals, etc.) of the marginalized (*dalit*, tribal, women, etc.)”³⁹¹.

Some of those who attempted to live like an Indian and Christian at the same time had either to face some trouble with the Church or live as though they did not care about what the Church had to say.

Beside these efforts of inculturation, the *āśram* movement gained momentum in India. There was a general feeling that India is a spiritual nation and only a

384 M. AMALADOSS, *Beyond Inculturation. Can the Many be One?*, Delhi, Vidya Jyoti Education and Welfare Society/ISPCK, 2005, p. 94.

385 *Ibid.* p. 8.

386 S. RODHE, *Jules Monchanin. Pioneer in Christian-Hindu Dialogue*, Delhi, ISPCK, 1993, p. 72.

387 F. WILFRED, *Sunset in the East?*, Madras, Chair in Christianity University of Madras, 1991, pp. 235-236.

388 J. DUPUIS, ‘Dialogue in India Today’, p. 31. See also C.M. BASELIOS ‘Post Vatican Renewal. A Malankara Perspective’, in P. PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Church in India. Institution or Movement*, Bangalore, NBCLC, 1991, p. 52.

389 J. THECKANATH, ‘Inculturation as Proclamation of the Word’, in *Making Liturgical Celebration a Proclamation*, Bangalore, NBCLC, 2004, p. 36.

390 G. VAN LEEUWEN, ‘Liturgy. The Struggle for Relevance Continues’, in PUTHANANGADY, *Church in India*, p. 29.

391 *FAPA* III, p. 216.

spiritual inculturation can win the heart of India. The idea was that the *āśrams* would be the ideal place where an inculturated community of Christianity will be born. Therefore, the Church in India supported and encouraged it. Within a short period, several *āśrams* emerged to present a spiritually inculturated face of the Church in India.

2.3. The *Āśram* Movement: The Catholic *Āśrams* as a Means of Inculturation in India in the Area of Community Building

In this section, we shall make a detailed survey of the Catholic *āśram* movement. We will start our review by clarifying the original meaning of the word *āśram* and its difference with the Christian concept of monastery. We will then make a survey about the location and life in the *āśram*, followed by a brief probing into the importance of the *āśram* in ancient and modern India. Thereafter, we shall investigate in detail the Christian *āśram* movement and, in particular, the Catholic *āśram* movement, with its origin, life, development, and decline. Then, our evaluation considers the positive contribution provided by the *āśrams* in the field of inculturation and community building, and, subsequently, we present the failures of the *āśram* movement in fulfilling the aims of inculturation and community building. Finally, we will roll out the longing for a new way of being church as seen in the documents and writings of theologians, which, in combination with the dissatisfaction about the *āśram* movement, is the larger context of the research question, which prompts us to launch further research into the *Khrist Bhakta* movement.

2.3.1. The Concept of *Āśram*

The word *āśram* has been derived from the Sanskrit root *śram*, which means to make efforts. The meaning of the derived word *āśram* is a state in which one makes efforts on one's own. Sanskrit writers describe *āśramā* or *āśram* as a place where *tapas* (austerities) are performed³⁹². Etymologically, the Sanskrit word *āśram* has two meanings. The first is that of a religious hermitage or a residence where holy people live and perform religious austerities of prayer, *yōgā*, penance, etc.³⁹³. In general, this word is used to denote this meaning. Secondly, the word *āśramā* also refers to a stage of life. According to the Hindu ideal of life, every individual is expected to go through four stages (*āśramās*) of life. The first is the student stage, the second the family stage, the third the stage of a *saṃnyāsī* (monk), and the last is the stage of forest dweller or wandering hermit³⁹⁴.

392 H. RALSTON, *Christian Ashrams. A New Religious Movement in Contemporary India*, Lewiston, The Edwin Mellen Press, 1987, p. 42.

393 G.S. GHURYE, *Indian Sadhus*, Bombay, The Popular Book Depot, 1953, p. 16.

394 According to some earlier texts of Hinduism, the four stages are also considered as four *āśramas* and regarded not as temporary stages of a person's life but as four alternate and permanent modes of life open to

The statement of the *All India Consultation on Āśrams* describe *āśram* “as a place of an intense and sustained spiritual quest, centred on a guru, man or woman recognized by others as a person of deep spiritual experience. In an *āśram* primacy is given to this relentless quest through *sādhnā* or specifically Indian spiritual practices. It is a place where above all, people can experience God”³⁹⁵. *Āśram* gives the glimpse about the concrete expression of the Indian spiritual quest. “It [*āśram*] is not an institution in the ordinary sense of the term. It is an organism, rather than an organization, and it is admirably suited to the religious conditions of India”³⁹⁶.

2.3.1.1. The Christian Monastery and the Indian *Āśram*

The Christian monastery and the Indian *āśram* are not identical, though both of them are places for meditation and renunciation of the world. The Christian monasteries have strict rules, structures, and timetables. Every individual is assigned a particular function and all the members are supposed to take part in all the community activities. The head of the monastery functions more or less as the head of a family and makes decisions concerning most aspects of monastery life. There is mutual love, sharing, and interaction. The whole atmosphere is community centred³⁹⁷. Well-defined and set prayer-forms and spiritual exercises are prescribed and followed. These spiritual exercises in community are considered as means for God-realization. Mostly the monasteries are part of religious organizations. For the most part the members form one community and spend their whole life in the monastery.

Unlike a monastery, an *āśram* is completely disconnected from larger associations³⁹⁸. An *āśram* does not prescribe creedal or denominational tests. It is non-sectarian and non-denominational. No rigid strict rules or discipline is maintained. It is non-authoritarian. The guru does not exercise the authority of an abbot or the head of a monastery as in the Christian monasteries. He is like an older brother instructing the younger ones in spiritual exercises and discipline³⁹⁹. However, one imposes strict rules on oneself. Every member is free to follow his

an individual, and an individual may freely choose only one. See for detail P. OLIVELLE, *The Asrama System. The History and Hermeneutics of a Religious Institution*, New York/Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993, pp. 73-111. See also G.S. GHURYE, *Indian Sadhus*, p. 89. Here we find some kind of a similarity in the four types of monks classified by St. Benedict in the first chapter on the rule of St. Benedict. The first kind is called “cenobites”, who live in a monastery, where they serve under a rule and an abbot. The second kind called “anchorites” are those who, after their long training under an abbot or monastery, pursue their spiritual life alone. The third kind of monks called “landlopers” are those living by twos and threes together or even alone, who have no prior experience of a monastery or the rule of a superior. And the fourth class of monks are called “gyrovagues”, who keep going from one province or monastery to another. Benedict condemns the last two types.

395 Quoted in S. PAINADATH (ed.), *Solitude and Solidarity*, p. 154.

396 E. ASHIRVATHAM, *Christianity in the Indian Crucible*, p. 174.

397 The desert Fathers were living in the desert and were living alone as hermits. The Carthusians and the Trappists are hermits living in community.

398 SCHOUTEN, *Jesus as Guru*, p. 164.

399 ASHIRVATHAM, *Christianity in the Indian Crucible*, p. 175.

or her means of God-realization within the general framework of *āśram*. Any seeker can come and stay for a short period or as long as he/she wishes as there is the prevalence of informality, which makes it possible for anyone to come and stay as long as they choose⁴⁰⁰. There is no set form of prayer and spiritual exercises prescribed for all. Ample scope is provided for unhurried prayer and reflection and for the deepening of the spiritual life. Values such as *ahimsa* or non-injury, friendliness to all, *asaṅga* or non-attachment to material things are fostered while discarding the desire for material good and for the fruits of labour.

2.3.1.2. The Location of an *Āśram*

An *āśram* is normally located in forests or river banks away from human habitation, amidst natural surroundings conducive to spiritual instruction and meditation. It is organized around a guru who has come to the third stage of life, and who has “dedicated his life in an extraordinary manner to religious exercise (*śramā*), living, in all likelihood, in areas somewhat removed from villages and towns”⁴⁰¹. Although such a guru lives in a dwelling away from the cares of the world, soon the disciples who are in search of the advice of such gurus surround him⁴⁰². An *āśram* is born when disciples accept the guru and, thus, the place where he was living becomes an *āśram*⁴⁰³. So, ideally, an *āśram* is not founded by the *guru* or by someone. Disciples gather around the guru and live together a more or less communal life. The banks of holy rivers and the hilltops and caves in the forests become the natural choice of the gurus who have already left the cares of the world.

2.3.1.3. Life in the *Āśram*

Men and women of different cultures, places, regions, and creeds collect together in the *āśram*⁴⁰⁴. Members are linked together by a common desire to discover truth. The common goal is God-realization and realization of oneness with one’s fellow men. Members come together for meals but they eat in silence. The *āśrams* provide two meals, each one normally consisting of two items, namely, *capātī* (bread) and *dāl* (pulses or lentils). However, a good number of seekers are content with one meal⁴⁰⁵. Every *āśram* has a minimum common programme in which all the members are expected to join⁴⁰⁶. Mostly, all come together for the

400 *Ibid.* p. 150.

401 OLIVELLE, *The Asrama System*, p. 19.

402 V. MATAJI, *Gurus, Āśrams and Christians*, Madras, The Christian Literature Society, 1980, p. 41.

403 V. MATAJI, ‘Finding Our Roots before We Take Wing’, in V. MATAJI (ed.), *Christian Ashrams. A Movement with a Future?* Delhi, ISPCK, 1993, p. 7.

404 TYAGIMAI, ‘The Role of the Guru and the *Āśram* in the Hindu Tradition’, in V. MATAJI (ed.), *Shabda Shakti Sangam*, Rishikesh, Jeevan Dhara Sadhana Kutir, 1995, p. 147.

405 GHURYE, *Indian Sadhus*, pp. 250-251.

406 For example, at Sivanada *āśram*, Bihar (the Bihar school of *Yogā*) the young members rise at 05.00 and are kept very busy, in gardening, in cultivating and preparing food, in publishing and printing, in ac-

morning meditation (from 05.00 to 06.00), noon prayer, the evening *ārītī*, the occasional discourse by the *guru*, etc. Special emphasis is laid on a life of silence and meditation⁴⁰⁷. The members spend their time in personal *sādhnā* (spiritual practices). Every seeker is supposed to support the *āśram* by his/her manual labour which is called *āśram sēva*. There are no interactions between the seekers, but they are free to meet the spiritual guide or the *guru*. Pilgrims and spiritual seekers for a shorter duration of 10 to 15 days are also welcome in any *āśram*. For such seekers, there are more spiritual exercises like common worship, meditation, *yoga*, discourse, etc. In addition, to the benefit of such members and for the benefit of general public there is preaching done by the *guru* or one of the learned *saṃnyāst*⁴⁰⁸.

2.3.1.4. *Āśrams* in Ancient and Modern India

Āśrams have been powerful religious institutions throughout Hindu history and theology. Most Hindu kings are known to have had a sage who would advise the royal family in spiritual matters and in other matters in times of crisis. Emperors, kings, and rulers, barefoot and with great respect, approached *ṛṣis* in their *āśrams* to seek counsel and blessings - a practice being continued even today by the politicians⁴⁰⁹. Most of the religious classics of Hinduism, including the Upanishads were written by the great sages who were leading the life of a monk⁴¹⁰.

Āśrams came again to the prominence of Indian society during the Bengal renaissance, which started with Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1775-1833) and ended with Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941). It was a period of awakening in Indian society in the field of philosophy, literature, science, religion, and politics, beginning from the province of Bengal and spreading to other parts of India. As part of the renaissance, there emerged several reform movements in both religious and social fields. The modern Indian *āśrams* developed as part of the Renaissance and played a vital role in social and religious renewal⁴¹¹. The sabarmati *āśram* (of M.K. Gandhi), initiated the political regeneration while the educational regeneration came through Shanti Niketan (of R.N. Tagore)⁴¹². Keshab Chandra Sen in 1872 had established an *āśram* in Calcutta, Ramakrishna Paramahansa and his disciple *Svāmī* Vivekananda founded the Ramakrishna *āśram*, in 1897. Rabindranath Tagore had established his Shanti Niketan in 1901. When Gandhiji

counting, in teaching, learning or research, in various forms of *yogā*. See RALSTON, *Christian Ashrams*, p. 65.

407 ASIRVATHAM, *Christianity in the Indian Crucible*, p. 149.

408 GHURYE, *Indian Sadhus*, p. 250.

409 F. WILFRED, *Beyond Settled Foundations. The Journey of Indian Theology*, Madras, Department of Christian Studies University of Madras, 1999, p. 43.

410 A. KAROKARAN, *Evangelization and Diakonia*, Bangalore, Dharmaram Publications, 1978, p. 186.

411 R.W. TAYLOR, *Acknowledging the Lordship of Christ*, Delhi, ISPCK, 1992, p. 53. See also COLLINS, *Christian Inculturation in India*, p. 79.

412 P. CHENCHIAH, 'The Church and the Indian Christian', in D.M. DEVASAHAYAM & A.N. SUDARISANAM (eds.), *Rethinking Christianity in India*, Madras, A.N. Sudarisanam, 1935, p. 100. What is in the parenthesis is added by the present researcher.

came to India from South Africa, he started his freedom struggle from his *āśram* at Sabarmati in 1915. His *āśrams* at Sevagram and at Sabarmati were centres of inspiration and enlightenment for the whole of India. The Ramana *āśram* at Tiruvannamalai and the Aurobindo *āśram* founded in 1926 by Aurobindo Ghose at Pondicherry were also important in India. These *āśrams* contributed in combining the religio-cultural activities with a reformation of Hinduism and a myth of a past golden age⁴¹³.

2.3.2. The Christian Āśrams

2.3.2.1. Origin

Many people, including some Christians think that the monastic life of Christians came to India with the arrival of Latin Christianity. However, the Indian church historian M. Mundadan speaks of the few but clear documents that show the existence of monks and nuns in India in the early 16th century, who wore black habits and who led an ascetical life of great poverty, honesty, and chastity⁴¹⁴. However, that tradition became extinct due to unknown reasons. In 1624, an attempt was made by the initiative of the Archdeacon of the Kerala Church, who wrote to Pope Urban VII seeking permission to found a religious order under the rule of St. Basil. A community of five priests started to live at Edappilly and adopted the name “Congregation of St. Thomas the Apostle.” Mundadan shows how this community became a victim of the ever-recurring conflict between the Archbishop and the Jesuit missionaries on one side, and the Archdeacon and the St. Thomas Christians on the other⁴¹⁵.

The seeds of the first Christian *āśram* in the modern sense can be seen in the dwelling of Robert de Nobili (1577-1656). Kuriakose Elias Chavara (1805-1871), the founder of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) Congregation, introduced the monastic life among the St. Thomas Christians⁴¹⁶. Together with two of his colleagues, Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara, he founded a monastic community in 1831. This community continues to live a communal life, which combines contemplation and active service⁴¹⁷. The monasteries started by him are called *āśrams*. However, they are not *āśrams* in the Hindu style nor are they meant for evangelization; they are intended purely for living an austere life and to guide the Church in Kerala.

We have already seen that Upadhyaya started a venture of Indian *āśram* at Jabalpur, but was met with opposition from the church authorities. Scholars consider this short-lived *āśram* at the Narmada in 1899 as the first Catholic *āśram* in

413 TAYLOR, *Acknowledging the Lordship of Christ*, p. 53. See also COLLINS, *Christian Inculturation in India*, p. 79.

414 A.M. MUNDADAN, *History and Beyond*, Aluva, Jeevass Publications, 1997, p. 157.

415 *Ibid.* p. 158-159.

416 COLLINS, *Christian Inculturation in India*, p. 78.

417 P.M. COLLINS, *Context, Culture and Worship. The Quest for Indian-ness*, Delhi, ISPCK, 2006, p. 123.

the modern sense. This was started in order to present Christianity as an Indian form of religion. The idea of an *āśram* after the model of Hindu *āśram* was not acceptable to the Catholic Church in India of that time.

It can be said that both Protestants and Catholics took a kind of inspiration or cue from the *āśrams* founded by the leaders of the Indian renaissance whom we have mentioned above⁴¹⁸. The God's *Darbār* founded by the Hindu leader N.V. Tilak in 1917 is an important attempt for our point of view. He introduced a unique movement called *Darbār* of the Lord Jesus Christ. "It was evolved as a result of his great desire to relate Christianity to India's spiritual heritage and to find an appropriate way of presenting Christ to Indians"⁴¹⁹. The members of the *Darbār* accepted Jesus as their supreme *Guru* and spent time in meditating on his life as shown in Bible. They had a routine of three times of community prayer besides working selflessly (*niṣkāṁ karm*) to contribute to the *Darbār* funds. The aim of the *Darbār* was to form a brotherhood of the baptised and unbaptised disciples of Christ⁴²⁰. However, this movement was short-lived as Tilak's life was cut short due to sickness.

It was not until the 1920s that Christians showed any practical interest in the *āśram* tradition as a possible source of inspiration for community living⁴²¹. The Protestants were the first to venture more deeply into the idea of the modern *āśram* movement in India. They started the Christukula *āśram* (Family of Christ *āśram*) at Tirupattur, Tamil Nadu in 1921⁴²². Founded by Dr. Yesudasan and Dr. Forrester Paton with the aim of bearing witness to Christ by being a living, serving community, the main form of service aimed at was medical⁴²³. Similar *āśrams* sprang up soon in different parts of India. The earliest ones are: the Christa Seva Sangha started in Pune by J.C. Winslow, an Anglican missionary priest in 1922, and in 1931 he was joined by four Anglican priests and three laymen; the Christu Dasa *āśram* (the first one by the Mar Thoma Church) founded in 1929 under the leadership of P. John Varghese at Palaghat, Kerala; the Christavashram started by a group of three men (K.I. Mathai, J.P. Moothedath, and K.K. Chandy) at Manganam, Kerala in 1934; the Vidiyelli *āśram* pioneered by two professors of Sarah Tucker College at Saymalai, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, and the Christu Shishya *āśram* started in 1936 at Tadadakam, Tamil Nadu in 1932.

418 The leaders of many of the *āśram* movement (especially the Protestants) based their communities on Gandhi's principle of *āśram* life and identified with his *Svadēśī* (use of local resources) movement. See for details, H. RALSTON, *Christian Ashrams*, pp. 26-27. See also TAYLOR, *Acknowledging the Lordship of Christ*, p. 53.

419 J. PLAMTHODATHIL, *The Experiential Response of N.V. Tilak*, Madras, The Christian Literature Society, 1979, p. 56.

420 *Ibid.*

421 ASHIRVADAM, *Christianity in Indian Crucible*, p. 178.

422 Though many people consider the Christukula *āśram* as the first Christian *āśram* in the modern sense, the Bethany *āśram* of the Syrian Orthodox church, founded by P.T. Geevarghese at Ranni-Perunad in Kerala in 1918 has the distinction of being the first of the Modern Christian *āśrams*.

423 GRANT, 'Āśram Living as Creative Ministry', p. 149.

On the Catholic part, the *āśram* life as a serious undertaking comes with the starting of the Saccidananda *āśram* in 1950 by Jules Monchanin and Henri Le Saux (Abhishiktananda) at Shantivanam, Tiruchirappilly, Tamil Nadu⁴²⁴. This *āśram* could be considered as the mother of the later Catholic *āśrams*. Most of those who started *āśrams* spent some time at this *āśram* at Shantivanam. Francis Acharya and Bede Griffiths started the *āśram* in Kurisumala in Kerala in 1958⁴²⁵. In 1950 we see the starting of an *Āśram* in Belgaum by a Goan Jesuit, Svāmī Animananda (Armando Alvares). However, most of the Catholics in India were so “thoroughly Europeanized” that they were not keen to look at the Hindu contemplative style of an *āśram* as a model for them⁴²⁶. This attitude changes with the shift in theological thinking initiated by the Second Vatican Council.

The acceptance by the Christians of the *āśram* life as a model introduces a new stage in the encounter between Gospel and culture in India⁴²⁷. The *āśram* was then taken as the mode of inculturation of Christian spirituality and life style. The *All India Seminar on the Church in India Today* in 1969 had recommended that in India encouragement should be given to the monastic vocation and the setting up of *āśrams* both in rural and urban areas⁴²⁸. It gave encouragement to “those who show signs of a special vocation for the life of prayer and silence, or prayer and service in an *āśram* setting, even if they are already leading a priestly or religious life”⁴²⁹.

2.3.2.2. The Life in the Catholic *Āśrams*

Following the model of Indian *āśrams*, the residents who opt for the Catholic *āśram* life, lead a simple way of life. They wear the attire of an Indian *saṃnyāsi* and live in simple huts on vegetarian meals. They follow the other customs like sitting on the floor, often walking barefooted, etc. The members try to preserve the atmosphere of silence, poverty and simplicity in their lives. The buildings of the *āśram* reflect simplicity and no luxuries. Each individual has a cell, which provides the opportunity for solitary prayer and meditation and the practice of *yoga*.⁴³⁰ They spend most of the time in spiritual exercises, reading the scriptures and working within the *āśram* compound⁴³¹. The members come together in the morning, at noon, and in the evening to meditate, to pray, and to establish a har-

424 Richard W. Taylor thinks of the *āśram* founded in Ranchi by Svāmī Animananda in 1940 as the first Catholic *āśram*. However, not much is known about this *āśram*. See TAYLOR, *Acknowledging the Lordship of Christ*, pp. 57-58.

425 B. GRIFFITHS, *Christian Ashram. Essays towards a Hindu-Christian Dialogue*, London, Darton Longman & Todd, 1966, p. 41.

426 RALSTON, *Christian Ashrams*, p. 37.

427 *Ibid.*

428 Declaration of All-India seminar, in *All India Seminar. Church in India Today*, p. 243.

429 *Ibid.* p. 253.

430 M. VALLIPALAM, ‘The Impact of Consecrated Life on Indian Society’, in *International Review of Sociology of Religion*, 48, 2001, 2, p. 272.

431 AMALADOSS, *Do Ashrams have a Future?*, p. 978.

mony with nature and with the divine. There are special prayers and hymns for each time of the day⁴³².

Generally, the Indian Christian monks do not engage in active apostolate such as parishes, schools, or hospitals, but many of them engage in some activities within the precincts of their *āśrams* besides their daily prayers, meditation, and other spiritual exercises⁴³³. The Christian *āśrams* consider Jesus as the *Guru*, or rather as the *Satguru* (true master) of every *āśram*. However, “the catholic *āśrams* are more inclined to regard a human guru as essential and to accept that authority rests in the guru”⁴³⁴.

2.3.2.3. Growth and Development

The *All India Seminar* in 1969 had called upon the Church in India to encourage the *āśram* way of life. The *āśrams* were regarded as the means to address a two-fold concern, namely, an inculturated Church and a genuine fellowship with the members of other religions. The seminar focused attention on the mystical tradition of India, stressed the need for more *āśrams*, and invited more Christians to monastic and contemplative life⁴³⁵.

In the following years, about fifty *āśrams* of Catholic initiative have emerged within three decades⁴³⁶. There was a general thinking among the church leaders that the Indian mind is religious and to win the heart of India, Christians had to present themselves as spiritual persons. The *āśrams* were conceived as the centre of spirituality. Hence, we find the emergence of these several *āśrams* within a short span.

In the meeting of the consulters with the Liturgical Commission of the CBCI at Mangalore in January 1978, it was proposed that a get-together and sharing of members living in *āśrams* should be organized and should be followed by deep study and wider consultation so as to formulate guidelines if required⁴³⁷. Accordingly, an “*All-India Consultation on Āśrams*” was convened in June 1978 at the NBCL to evaluate and to propose ways and means for furthering the *āśram* movement⁴³⁸. At the meeting an “*Āśram Aikya*” (All India Fellowship of Catholic *Āśrams*), which meets biennially, was formed to foster unity among the *āśrams*, to give mutual support and stimulation, and to represent their needs to

432 CORNILLE, *The Guru in Indian Catholicism*, p. 168.

433 VALLIPALAM, ‘The Impact of Consecrated Life on Indian Society’, p. 272.

434 RALSTON, *Christian Ashrams*, p. 112. For a detailed account about the role of *guru* in Catholic *āśrams*, see Cornille, *The Guru in Indian Catholicism*, pp. 167-181. See also for the details about how Jesus is regarded as the *Guru* in, J.P. SCHOUTEN, *Jesus as Guru*, pp. 184-198.

435 ‘Resolutions of the intermediary assemblies’, in *All India Seminar Church in India Today*, Delhi, CBCI, 1969, p. 279.

436 S. PAINADATH, ‘The Spiritual and Theological Perspectives of Ashram’, in S. PAINADATH (ed.), *Solitude and Solidarity*, p. 123.

437 VAN LEEUWEN, *Fully Indian Authentically Christian*, p. 82.

438 ‘The Statement of the All-India Consultation on Ashrams 1978’, in PAINADATH (ed.), *Solitude and Solidarity*, p. 155.

those concerned⁴³⁹. From two *āśrams*⁴⁴⁰ before the *All India Seminar* in 1969, the number of *āśrams* grew to 66 in 2003 and were spread all over India⁴⁴¹.

2.3.2.4. Decline of the *Āśram* Movement

Sociologically, the Christian *āśram* movement emerged at the time of struggle for an independent India as a means to integrate Hindu and Christian spirituality, and to liberate Indian Christianity from the western form, and to lead a simple way of life. As Ralston points out, the *āśrams* were identified with the nationalist movement and, above all, with Gandhi, who demonstrated that the way of renunciation (*saṃnyās*) and the way of selfless action (*karm yoga*) could be wedded in a community to realize liberation (*mokṣ*) for the individual, fellowship and solidarity for the community (*satsaṅg*) and transformation of society⁴⁴². The *āśrams* initially attracted some followers, and had become centres of community building and inculturation, but they slowly lost their vitality. After independence, most of the Gandhian idealism was lost, and as a result, there was a decline in Gandhian principles.⁴⁴³ Eventually, the Hindu *āśrams* also lost their dynamism. This also had a bearing in the Catholic *āśrams*. Although the number of catholic *āśrams* increased, it did not become an attractive option in the Church and in society. In a sense, the Christian *āśrams* lost their dynamism⁴⁴⁴. The Indian Church, in independent India, has done much more in the educational and social sector. A glance at the directory of any diocese in India will reveal the enormous service the church renders in the field of education. Though the Church took upon itself the *āśram* life as a model for the Indian Church, still, the total number (66) and the personnel engaged in the *āśram* movement is very meagre. *Āśrams* could not become a trend in the mission of the Church.

Vandana Mataji, one of the pioneers of the *āśram* movement feels that the *āśram* movement has not really become a movement since lay people have not taken any lead role in it⁴⁴⁵. In some cases, the Catholic *āśrams* have been established by bishops or religious superiors and have become prayer houses rather than becoming spontaneous communities around a guru⁴⁴⁶.

As we had seen, the *āśrams* are basically centred on a guru. In the initial phase, the Catholic *āśrams* had charismatic personalities as gurus, who could at-

439 The Statement of the All-India Consultation on *Ashrams*, 1978, pp. 154-155.

440 There were three *āśrams*, but the third one (at Belgaon) was not known as *āśram* at that time, and did not make any impact on the church.

441 There are 7 *āśrams* in Andhra Pradesh, 6 in Karnataka, 14 in Tamil Nadu, 15 in Kerala, 4 in Gujarat 5 in Maharashtra, and 15 in the rest of North and eastern parts of India. See PAINADATH, *Solitude and Solidarity*, p. 178.

442 RALSTON, *Christian Ashrams*, p. 113.

443 India started economic reforms in 1991 and opted for a capitalist model of economy replacing the socialist model by opening its markets for international trade and investments. It has also contributed to changes in social life and value systems.

444 *Ibid.* p. 115.

445 MATAJI, 'Finding Our Roots before We Take Wing', p. 18.

446 RALSTON, *Christian Ashrams*, p. 118.

tract some disciples. A good number of them were European missionaries. However, in the next generation we do not find many such Gurus. Not many Indians showed interest in the *āśram* life. Not many young people are attracted to *āśram*. Those who come to join the *āśram* are mostly the religious who are already members of an order. The total number of people fully involved in Catholic *āśrams* is no more than a few hundred, which, considering the fact that there are about fifteen million Catholics in India, is negligible⁴⁴⁷. In addition, interestingly, we observe the emergence of new *āśrams*, small in size but lacking disciples. Bishop Patrick D'Souza of the Varanasi diocese agrees that for the Church it is difficult to find suitable persons for the *āśram* life⁴⁴⁸. Most of the *āśrams* are visited by religious and priests for the purpose of making retreats. Neither Christians nor Hindus seem drawn to the Catholic *āśrams*⁴⁴⁹.

2.3.3. *An Evaluation of the Catholic Āśram Movement*

2.3.3.1. Contribution in the Area of Inculturation.

In the field of inculturation, *āśrams* have played a significant role in identifying the Indian Christians not as foreigners but as the sons and daughters of the soil. People in general find in *āśrams* “a new form of Christianity that is not alien to Indian culture and spiritual traditions”⁴⁵⁰. The Catholic *āśrams* were seen as a truly Indian expression of the Kingdom of God as opposed to the idea of the Church introduced from the West⁴⁵¹, and a sign of fidelity to India's ancient culture and, in particular, to its ascetic and contemplative traditions⁴⁵².

There were many Christians in India who were not happy to be identified as Westerners. The *āśrams* have helped many Indian Christians to feel themselves as Indian Christians. “The charismatic leaders of the *āśram* movement gave voice to the sentiments of those Christians who were concerned about the alien and unintelligible nature of the Christian message for Indians”⁴⁵³. It also presented Christianity to the Hindus in a way understandable for them.

447 CORNILLE, *The Guru in Indian Catholicism*, p. 146.

448 P. D'SOUZA, 'Trends in Evangelization in the Church Today', in *Indian Missiological Review* 13, 1991, 1, p. 53.

449 The *āśram* movement has been criticized by the Hindu writer Sita Ram Goel. He calls the Gurus of Catholic *āśram* “swindlers” and accuses them of designing yet another means in the form of *āśram* to convert the Hindus. See for details, S.R. GOEL, *Catholic Ashrams. Sannyasins or Swindlers?*, Delhi, Voice of India, 2nd ed., 1994.

450 S. ELAVATHINGAL, 'Saccidananda Ashram Narsinghpur. A New Paradigm for Inter Religious Dialogue', in *Third Millennium* 3, 2000, 1, p. 67.

451 R.W. TAYLOR, 'Christian Ashrams as a Style of Mission in India', in *International Review of Missions* 68, 1979, 271, p. 281. The works of Jyoti Sahi and Joy Elakannapuzha are very important in the field of inculturation of art and architecture. The works of JYOTI SAHI is given in his book, *Holy Ground. A New Approach to the Mission of the Church in India*, Auckland, Pace Publications, 1998. The work of Elakannapuzha is given in the book by J. VADAKUMCHERY, *Icons of the Unseen. Asian Theology through the Eyes of Artist Joy*, Bhopal, Carmel International Publications & Poornodaya, 2002.

452 J. THALIYATH, 'The Thoughts of the Seminar', in *All India Seminar Church in India Today*, p. 523.

453 RALSTON, *Christian Ashrams*, p. 26.

Āśrams have also contributed immensely to the inculturation in the area of art, architecture, music, painting, etc.⁴⁵⁴. The chapels/churches are constructed mostly like Hindu temples. The worship, meditation, etc., are done sitting cross-legged, and the Indian decorative articles, incense, lights, etc., are used. The whole atmosphere is kept silent and serene.

2.3.3.2. Contribution in the Area of Liturgical Inculturation

Āśrams have contributed to the inculturation of Church especially in the field of liturgy. Worship in the *āśram* is considered more natural and satisfying for the Indians than the worship in the churches⁴⁵⁵. Many Catholic *āśrams* pioneered liturgical inculturation. They have continued to experiment in the field of Indian forms of worship⁴⁵⁶. The inclusion of *bhajans* in the prayers, the posture of sitting down on the floor, the introduction of *yoga*, the use of oil lamps, etc., to Christian life is mediated through the *āśrams*. They have also promoted the rituals, such as *ārītī* (waving of lights), Indian music, postures and gestures, such as joining the hands in *añjali*, and celebrating the Hindu festival such as *divālī* (the festival of light)⁴⁵⁷. In addition, in *āśrams* the members have succeeded in using the Indian methods (*sādhnā*) of prayer for God-realization⁴⁵⁸. They also have worked for the creation of an indigenous liturgy. For this purpose they made use of traditional symbols such as water, lamps, flowers, incense sticks, salt, the sacred book, etc.

2.3.3.3. Contribution in Other Fields

The Catholic *āśrams* have succeeded in promoting interreligious fellowship. “The contemplative atmosphere, closeness to common people, harmony with nature, sylvan surroundings, simplicity of life, vegetarian food, and generous hospitality and above all the genuine openness to the divine Spirit attract believers of different religions to *āśrams*”⁴⁵⁹. Most of the *āśrams* have special common prayers and discussions with members of other religions on the occasion of the important days of other religions. It is a place where people from different religions come together for prayer, sharing, and living together. Thus, it is a place from which initiatives in dialogue have sprung⁴⁶⁰, and where a dialogue of life takes place⁴⁶¹. They initiated a positive attitude to other religions, stimulated an in-depth study

454 TAYLOR, ‘Christian Ashrams as a Style of Mission in India’, p. 293.

455 P. THOMAS, ‘Christian Ashrams and Evangelization of India’, in *Indian Church History Review* 11, 1977, 2, p. 214.

456 GRANT, *God’s People in India*, p. 57.

457 PAINADATH, ‘*The Spiritual and Theological Perspectives of Ashrams*’, p. 127.

458 *Ibid.* p. 126.

459 *Ibid.* p. 130.

460 B. ROBINSON, *Christians Meeting Hindus. An Analysis and Theological Critique of the Hindu-Christian Encounter in India*, Oxford, Regnum, 2004, p. 55.

461 *Ibid.* p. 130.

and positive assimilation of spiritual Hinduism, and created a deep interest in Hindu-Christian meetings⁴⁶². The interreligious discussions initiated by the *āśrams* also became a point of departure for members of several religious communities, especially the Hindus, Muslims, and Christians, to come to the same table with mutual respect⁴⁶³.

Catholic *āśrams* have also contributed in presenting the face of a humble Church. The whole atmosphere of the *āśram* is humble and unassuming and thus makes it a welcoming place for any ordinary Indians. It has to be understood against the various institutional presences of the Church through its various huge (Westernised) educational institutions. *Āśrams* are communities which are dedicated to simplicity of life and which offer an alternative life-style⁴⁶⁴.

The *āśrams* have also contributed to the creation of Indian theology⁴⁶⁵. Most of the pioneers of Indian theology and indigenisation were associated with the *āśrams*. They were living either fully or for some time in the *āśrams*. Even today, many Indian theologians are associated with the *āśram* movement.

2.3.3.4. Dissatisfaction about the *Āśram* Movement

The Catholic *āśrams* have fallen short of the expectations and aims of inculturation and community building, which was proposed by the *All India Seminar* of 1969 and the subsequent encouragement given to the initiatives to open *āśrams* all over India.

The very word *āśram* and its reference to the four stages of life, the adopting of a *saṃnyāsī* life style, etc., is seen as endorsing *brahmanical* Hinduism and the caste system⁴⁶⁶. Therefore, many Christians belonging to the dalit and tribal sections of the society do not welcome the inculturation initiated by the *āśram* movement. They see it as a continuation of the caste practices and ideology. Similar objections were raised against the liturgical inculturation from the same sections of the society. Mundadan says that both “the *āśram* movement and the liturgical inculturation have their point of insertion in, and affinity with, the *brahmanic-sanskritic* upper caste tradition and intended in making Christianity acceptable to the Hindus by clothing it in the *brahmanical* garb”⁴⁶⁷.

In some conservative and some official Catholic circles, the movement has been greeted with suspicion⁴⁶⁸. They view the *āśram* movement as a means of Hinduization of Christianity⁴⁶⁹. They regard the wearing of the robe of the *saṃnyāsī* and the adoption of the Hindu lifestyle and its rituals as betrayal of the Christian faith.

462 MUNDADAN, *History and Beyond*, pp. 339-340.

463 RALSTON, *Christian Ashrams* p. 116.

464 *Ibid.* p. 118.

465 TAYLOR, *Acknowledging the Lordship of Christ*, p. 66.

466 COLLINS, *Christian Inculturation in India*, p. 77.

467 A.M. MUNDADAN, *Paths of Indian Theology*, Bangalore, Dharmaram Publications, 1998, p. 180.

468 ROBINSON, *Christians Meeting Hindus*, p. 56.

469 CORNILLE, *The Guru in Indian Catholicism*, p. 193.

Since the *āśram* is centred on one person and his charismatic leadership, finding a substitute to fill the gap when the guru leaves was not an easy task. An institution so dependent on the personality of the leader is bound to have a rather unstable history as success and failure depends to a large extent to his/her charismatic leadership⁴⁷⁰. Similarly, the Catholic *āśrams* were dependent on pioneers, even when some were founded by the diocese or religious congregation. Moreover, when the pioneer leaves, the *āśram* suffers. Many times the new *guru* may not be a person suitable for guiding the *āśram* spiritually. He/she may be a person who has rational rather than charismatic authority⁴⁷¹.

The most important criticism against the *āśrams* was that it did not stand for social justice and for forming a just society⁴⁷². For example, George M. Soares Prabhu, an Indian theologian said, “the *āśrams* are not a suitable place for doing theology in India today”⁴⁷³. He argues that the *āśram* is associated with *brahmanism*, which is highly oppressive, and is more oriented to the contemplative life and not to *agape*, i.e., inter-human concern. Therefore, the Christian concept of *agape* and the commitment to society is not explicitly seen in *āśrams*. *Āśrams* are more individualistic where one is concerned with the salvation of one’s own soul. Therefore, those Christians (both Protestant and Catholic), who seek social transformation, tend to associate themselves with the secular people’s movements⁴⁷⁴.

Catherine Cornille and Helen Ralston show how the term “Catholic *āśram*” itself is a contradiction. *Āśram* is essentially autonomous and the epithet “Catholic” implies that it submits to institutional prescriptions and control⁴⁷⁵. Unlike Hindu *āśrams*, a Christian *āśram* is not or cannot be autonomous, since it depends, at least partially, for its functioning on ecclesiastical superiors⁴⁷⁶. Tensions also have occurred between the institutional authority of the bishop and the charismatic authority of the guru, due to the opposition of some bishops to the experimentation (mainly in liturgy) undertaken by the *āśram*⁴⁷⁷.

Though we had mentioned that Hindus saw *āśrams* as an Indian form of Christianity, some people did not share this view. Hindu thinkers like Sita Ram Goel ridicule this Catholic initiative⁴⁷⁸. He says that the Catholic *āśrams* are merely “aping” the Hindus. He claims that, at their best, the Christian *āśrams* can only produce hypocrites; at their worst, only scheming scoundrels. He says that it is useless to tell the missionaries that Hindu *sādhnā* has nothing to do with buying a piece of land, building some stylized houses on it, exhibiting pretentious

470 GRANT, *God’s People in India*, p. 57.

471 RALSTON, *Christian Ashrams*, p. 112.

472 *Ibid.* p. 118.

473 The letter of George M. Soares Prabhu, to Vandana Mataji, on 20 October 1991, in MATAJI (ed.), *Christian Ashrams*, p. 157.

474 RALSTON, *Christian Ashrams*, p. 115.

475 CORNILLE, *The Guru in India Catholicism*, p. 153 and RALSTON, *Christian Ashrams*, p. 103.

476 LESSER, *Why I am Here*, p. 136

477 CORNILLE, *The Guru in India Catholicism*, p. 151.

478 GOEL, *Catholic Āśrams*, pp. 15-25.

signboards, putting on a particular type of dress, and performing certain rituals in a particular way⁴⁷⁹.

Many *āśrams* were initiated, supported, and funded by the religious congregations⁴⁸⁰. The authorities of congregations are changed according to their term of office. The changed leadership may come up with the question of transfer of the few members who are committed to *āśram* and replace them with those who show no interest in the *āśram* life, which questions the future of the *āśram*. Membership in the ideal of an *āśram* cannot be from a transfer, but as the result of one's personal choice.

Most importantly, the lay people or the ordinary Catholics have not joined the *āśram* movement. It has been limited to priests and nuns who have already opted for a kind of monastic life. Though the founders of the Catholic *āśrams* were holy people, their holiness was not sufficiently attractive to draw *cēlas* (disciples) who would feed them, and build their *āśrams*⁴⁸¹. It seems that the *āśrams* have a hard task in finding successors to the pioneers⁴⁸². The number of Indian Christians who take to this kind of living and of expressing Christianity is exceedingly small⁴⁸³. Moreover, in the present structure, especially in India, there is very little possibility for lay people to get involved⁴⁸⁴. In most cases, the initiative for the *āśram* is a kind of elitist endeavour and a missionary project that came from the hierarchy or the religious and the attitudes of the lay people were not sufficiently attended to. In other words, the elitist initiative did not find its way to the hearts of the people at large. "An inculturation that is clerically inspired and clerically controlled is not accepted. It is too cerebral, too remote from the real life of the community"⁴⁸⁵. The *āśram* movement inspired by Indian culture and Gandhian idealism has almost dried up⁴⁸⁶. It seems that the Catholic *āśrams* appeal to the people from the west and not to the Hindus or Christians of India⁴⁸⁷. As a result, in the present time the "Catholic *āśrams* seem to attract more foreigners than Indians"⁴⁸⁸.

2.4. The Longing for a New Way of Being Church

It seems that the existing models of the Church and the attempted methods of inculturation were not suited for the Indian situation. Therefore, we find the emergence of a desire for a new way of being church. This desire is reflected in the

479 *Ibid.* pp. 16-25.

480 PAINADATH, *The Spiritual and Theological Perspectives of Āśrams*, p. 145.

481 LESSER, *Why I am Here*, p. 136.

482 AMALADOSS, *Beyond Inculturation*, p. 8.

483 H. KRAEMER, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, Bangalore, Centre for Contemporary Christianity, 2009, p. 375.

484 V. MATAJI, 'Concluding Reflections and Questions', in V. MATAJI (ed.), *Christian Ashrams*, p. 72.

485 SHORTER, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, p. 266.

486 S.J. SAMARTHA, 'Partners in Community. Some Reflections on Hindu-Christian Relations Today', in *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* 4, 1980, 2, p. 80.

487 CORNILLE, *The Guru in India Catholicism*, p. 201.

488 AMALADOSS, *Beyond Inculturation*, p. 8.

writings of individual theologians, and in the documents of the ITA and the FABC.

In India, a new political and economic culture has emerged in the recent past. Since 1991, the Indian government has adopted a capitalist economy and opted for opening its markets to the world outside. Globalization and economic liberalisation is fast changing Indian culture. Urban society is becoming more individualistic and consumerist. Godfrey D'Lima shows how the idealism of *svadeśī* (the ideal of using local resources) has given way to the consumerist culture. He also points out that there are no more "enemies in the form of "Colonialists" in India⁴⁸⁹. Gandhian principles of socialism and simplicity of life do not seem attractive to the present generation in India. Similarly, the efforts for inculturation, particularly the *āśram* movement modelled after the Gandhian *āśram* movement and his principles are not seen as satisfactory and useful.

Therefore, theologians in India are longing for a model that is suitable for the present day India. They believe that in the changed milieu, if the Church wants to be relevant it has to develop new ways of being church in the context of Indian realities⁴⁹⁰. The Church in India has to look for new types of Christian living⁴⁹¹ and become the source of a new *koinonia*, a new fellowship of all seekers after truth⁴⁹². Hence, many theologians, using different terms, have expressed their desire for a new form or a new model of Christian life in India⁴⁹³. The structures of church organisation and its ministry also have to be new, so as to make it not

489 G. D'LIMA, 'The Changing Face of Christianity', in *Vidyajyoti* 62, 1998, 4, p. 271. We had earlier noted that the *āśram* movement in India got momentum from the background of freedom struggle and *svadeśī* movement.

490 K. PATHIL, 'The Self Understanding of the Church in India Today', in E. D'LIMA & M. GONSALVES (eds.), *What does Jesus Christ Mean?*, Bangalore, Indian Theological Association, 1999, pp. 87-88.

491 P. PUTHANAGADY, 'Christian Community as a Multi-Cultural Reality', in K. KUNNUMPURAM, E. D'LIMA & J. PARAPPALLY (eds.), *The Church in India in Search of New Identity*, Bangalore, NBCLC, 1997, p. 189.

492 M. ZACHARIAH, *Inside the Indian Church*, Delhi, ISPCK, 1994, p. 103.

493 There are many other theologians who want to have a new way of being church. Besides using the term 'new way of being church' they have also used terms like, being church in a new way, new type of Christian living, new model of being church, new way of presenting Jesus Christ, new way of evangelization, etc. For details see P. PUTHANAGADY, 'Christian Community as a Multi Cultural Reality', in K. KUNNUMPURAM, E. D'LIMA, & J. PARAPPALLY (eds.), *The Church in India in Search of a New Identity*, pp. 177-190; J. KUTTIANIMATTATHIL, 'The Community of Disciples in Dialogue. A New Model of Being Church', in *Third Millennium* 4, 2001, 1, pp. 41-60; A. KAROKARAN, 'Mission. An Alternative Model', in *Third Millennium* 3, 2000, 1, pp. 29-44; I. DIAS, 'A Dialogue of Cultures. Cultural Issues in Mission', in *Cultures and Faith* 8, 2000, 2, p. 123; L. MALIECKAL, 'Syro Malabar Mission. New Challenges in Perspective', in *Mission and Community Building*, p.174; P. PUTHANAGADY, 'A New Way of Being Church', pp. 402-420; D. D'SOUZA, 'The Challenges to the Church Today', pp. 293-326. Kavunkal speaks of a paradigm shift in the identity of the church to that of a community of disciples of Jesus, See J. KAVUNKAL, 'Identity of Indian Church', in *Third Millennium* 4, 2001, 1, pp. 6-19. Kalluveettil speaks of the new possibilities of being churches of different orientations and ideologies in India. See P. KALLUVEETIL, 'Churches within the Church', in *Third Millennium* 2, 1999, 1, pp. 6-17. Amalados speaks of church becoming a liminal community, M. AMALADOSS, 'New Faces of Mission', in *Indian Missiological Review* 17, 1995, 3, pp. 53-68. Sachidanand has a new vision of Christianity where laity has a leading role. He wants the Indian Christians to head a new Indian renaissance on the principle of *Vasudaiva Kutumbakam* (earth as one family of God), See J. SACHIDANAD, 'A New Vision of Christianity', in *Indian Missiological Review* 16, 1994, 4, pp. 44-56.

creed-centred but life-centred⁴⁹⁴. The Christianity that emerges will have to be different from anything known before, but that does not mean that it will be less Christian⁴⁹⁵.

The Indian Theological Association, in their 17th Annual meeting in 1988, spoke about a new vision, a new disposition, and fresh habits for the Church in India. This, they felt, is essential to promoting a culture of interreligious collaboration and entering into the religiosity of India. The association said that as there is a central role for religion in India, in all the efforts of inculturation there is a need for entering into the religious ethos of the people⁴⁹⁶. Looking back at the efforts made in India, they realized the defects and cautioned that inculturation should neither be narrowed down to the idea of assimilating certain elements of a particular culture, nor to antiquarianism or elitism, but should be a “one-ness” with different subcultures and groups⁴⁹⁷. This is possible, they envisioned, only by reinterpreting the self-identity of Christians and cultivating this new vision.

The Association in its final statement of the 19th annual meeting in 1996 had presented this desire more as a challenge to the Church in India⁴⁹⁸. Concerning future action, the association felt that the Church must reformulate her image into a community capable of journeying with all those men and women of the country who will be ready to enter into communion with the followers of other faiths and ideologies, and build up neighbourhood communities of fellowship and sharing. Furthermore, the association called such neighbourhood communities a new type of Christian living and named them as “disciples of Christ”⁴⁹⁹. The association considered such communities as truly ecclesial communities even if their visible participation in certain aspects of the institutional Church may not be possible.

The statement of the FABC on “Evangelization, Mission and Theology of Dialogue” in 1990 had envisaged a new way of being church in Asia⁵⁰⁰. The Office of the Evangelization of the FABC had entitled their statement of 2000 as “A New Way of Being Church-in-Mission in Asia”⁵⁰¹. This they feel has to be done by local Churches moving beyond the ghettos and becoming the leaven, salt, and light in the world⁵⁰². The FABC makes it clear that the inculturated Church will be a community that will be fully integrated into the local human community and as a result, it will be a new way of being church in Asia. The bishops outline some characteristics of this new way of being church. They see this community in positive “relationship with the people of other faiths; it will be a community

494 G. D’LIMA, ‘The Changing Face of Christianity’, p. 271.

495 J.B. COBB, ‘Beyond pluralism’, in G. D’COSTA (ed.), *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered. The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1990, p. 94.

496 The Final Statement of the ITA 1988, in *Indian Theological Studies*, 26, 1989, 1, pp. 71-83.

497 *Ibid.* pp. 71-83.

498 Final Statement of ITA in *The Church in India in Search of a New Identity*, in K. KUNNUPURAM, E. D’LIMA & J. PARAPPALLY (eds.), Bangalore, NBCLC, 1997, p. 392.

499 *Ibid.* p. 392.

500 See the Statement of the Assembly in 1990 in *FAPA I*, pp. 273-289.

501 See the Statement on the Consultation on Asian Local Churches and Mission *Ad gentes, A New Way of Being Church-in-Mission in Asia*, in *FAPA III*, p. 221.

502 *Ibid.* pp. 222-223.

that is fully evangelized so that it acts as leaven in society; it will be a community that identifies itself with the poor and the marginalized; it will be a community in communion with the rest of the ecclesial community offering its original contribution to the universal salvific mission of Christ⁵⁰³.

The Statement of the Asia Theology Conference also speaks about the need for a new way of being church in Asia. It says that they are committed to a new way of being church which recognizes the work of the Spirit in other faith traditions and overcomes the obsession with the numbers, and are ready to become salt and light to the people of Asia and the world⁵⁰⁴. Cardinal Julius Dharmaatmadja also speaks about reshaping the way of being church in Asia. He wants the Churches in Asia to accept the religious and cultural values of Asia as “treasures” and to root the Church in this local religious and cultural reality⁵⁰⁵.

The longing for a new way of being church is present among the Indian bishops too. The CBCI points out the need for the Church in India to live her faith incarnated in her tradition, culture and spiritual heritage. The bishops want the Church to work out its own distinctive pattern to meet the exigencies of the local situations⁵⁰⁶. Archbishop Ivan Dias wanted the Church in India to evolve a new and daring approach to the cultural issues of India and discover ways and means of facing and transforming them⁵⁰⁷. The same desire for the new way of being church is echoed in *Ecclesia in Asia*, the post-synodal exhortation of Pope John Paul II, where he noted the desire of the Asian Synodal Fathers that the Church must be open to the new and surprising ways in which the face of Jesus might be presented in Asia⁵⁰⁸.

2.5. Overview and Conclusion

To sum up, we have presented the “foreignness” of Christianity in India and the various efforts for inculturation by some prominent individuals and the Catholic Church as a body guided by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India under the banner of the National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre. It is clear from our survey that the *āśram* movement and the other efforts for inculturation

503 *Ibid.* p. 218. The office of Human Development of the FABC discusses the challenges to the church in the context and within the framework of “A New Way of Being Church” in the 21st Century. Thereafter they present the vision of faith encounters in a new way of being faith communities. The document speaks about finding new ways of being by reinserting ourselves in the world of humanity and also the need for finding new ways to show the world that God is fully alive in the world. *FAPA IV*, p. 83. Richard R. Gaillardetz finds in Asia the emergence of a new way of being church and it begins with the rebirth of the theology of the local church characterized by dialogue and the participation of all believers. They consider the importance of this type of local church not as an alternative to the traditional Catholic belief in the universal Church, but a new way of considering the universal Church. See GAILLAARDETZ, *Ecclesiology for a Global Church*, pp. 120-122.

504 The Statement of the Asia Theology Conference 13, in *Jnanadeepa*, 5, 2002, 5, p. 145.

505 J. DHARMAATMADJA, ‘A New way of Being Church in Asia’, *Vidyajyoti* 63, 1999, pp. 888-889.

506 CBCI *Proclaiming Christ in India. Source Book for the Preparation of the Roman Synod 1974* the Evangelization of the Modern World, New Delhi: CBCI, n.d., p. 51.

507 DIAS, ‘A Dialogue of Cultures’, p. 123.

508 *Ecclesia in Asia* 20, p. 31.

initiated by individuals, and the efforts supervised and headed by NBCLC, did not become successful and acceptable models of inculturation in the area of community building. They did not effectively change the situation of the Church in India that remained as imported Church⁵⁰⁹. All these efforts remained isolated from the mainstream of the actual life of the common people.

At the same time, we see the emergence of a desire for a new way of being Church in India. This longing for a new model and the failure of the earlier attempts prompt us to look for alternative models suited for the Indian situation. This model has to be true to the Catholic faith, true to the Indian mind, and possible for the ordinary people to grasp and follow. Unless and until people accept the model, we cannot call it a successful one. Up to now, mostly armchair theologians and elitists of the Church led the efforts for inculturation and community building. These efforts came from above, not from below, and were the result of academic study rather than the spontaneous expression of faith lived at the grass roots⁵¹⁰ level. These efforts were conceived and implemented from an academic perspective. However, none of them was largely accepted by the people.

Now, in the actual field, right among the people, we find a movement called *Khrist Bhakta* (devotee of Christ). A movement that seems to be accepted, followed, and propagated by the people. People from all walks of life, especially the Hindus from the villages, are flocking in thousands. Every Sunday at the weekly prayer meeting organized at the Matridham *āśram*, Benares, U.P., around four to five thousand people participate. This movement has a following of around 40,000 to 50,000 people and is growing day by day. In addition, it has already out-numbered the Catholic population of the diocese. Can we then presume that the *Khrist Bhakta* movement will present us a successful model of inculturation in the area of community building? First, we need to find out what the *Khrist Bhakta* movement actually is. Hence, we will look at research into the details of the movement.

509 K. KUNNUPURAM, 'Inculturation and Ecclesiology', in *Indian Missiological Review* 19, 1997, 1, p. 48.

510 DUPUIS, 'Dialogue in India Today', p. 31.

Chapter 3

History, Organization, and Functioning of the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement

3.0. Introduction

On every Sunday and second Saturday, thousands of people, who are not baptised as Christians, come to worship Jesus in Matridham, a Catholic *āśram* in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, North India. These people, who are now called *Khrist Bhaktas* (devotees of Christ), are mainly Hindus belonging to several caste groups. They gather in the *āśram* to listen to the Word of God preached to them. They come from the neighbouring villages, cities, and districts and even from neighbouring states (provinces). The number of devotees has grown enormously and has taken on the form of a movement, now called the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement. This is happening in Varanasi, a holy city for the Hindus and a city known as the religious and cultural capital of India.

In this section, we research into the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement. First, we will expose the methodological framework we have applied. Second, we shall give a preliminary note on Varanasi and a presentation of the detailed history of the Matridham *āśram*. Third, we shall examine the background, origin, growth, and development of the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement. Fourth, we shall make an examination of the additional elements that have helped its growth and development. Fifth, we shall disclose the present status of the movement. Sixth, we shall make an examination of the part played by the Matridham *āśram* with its various activities. Seventh, we shall deal with the structure of the movement together with the roles played by the staff and the local leaders, which will be followed by a description of the key role played by Fr. Anil Dev, an IMS (Indian Missionary Society) member and the Guru of the *āśram* and head of the movement. Eighth, we shall explore the contribution of the diocese of Varanasi to this movement together with the activities of other *āśrams* and parishes run in the vicinity by the diocese. Ninth, we explore the vision of the leaders about the future of the movement. We have included the vision of Raphy Manjaly, the Bishop of the Varanasi diocese, Anil Dev, the IMS provincial, the staff members living in the Matridham *āśram*, priests living in the *āśrams* run by the diocese, and some diocesan clergy. Finally, we shall give a brief note on the works of the other churches mainly from Protestant denominations.

3.1. Methodological Clarifications and Considerations

Before proceeding with the research findings, we present a brief note on the methodological procedures and approaches.

3.1.1. Aim of the Research

The aim of our study is to discover, describe, and interpret the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement and to find out what possibilities it offers in our search for a successful model for inculturation of the Church in India. Our survey of earlier efforts has exposed the inadequacy of those attempts. The people did not receive them. On the other hand, the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement seems to be gaining more and more acceptance among the ordinary people. Therefore, we aim at researching the contribution of the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement to the inculturation of the Catholic Church in India in the area of community building. Concretely, we shall make a study of the movement from its origin to its present status, unearthing the roles played by different events and agents. We also intend to study the religious practices of the devotees at both home and the *āśram*. We also want to discover the implications or changes in their social and religious lives as a result of their new-found faith. We then intend to interpret and evaluate them in the light of the criteria we have formulated. In our endeavour to study the fabric of this movement we shall be giving attention to its origin, form, size, structure, and organization, giving specific focus to their practices in the religious domain.

3.1.2. Research Strategy

Sociologists and anthropologists use many strategies in gaining data for a scientific investigation of human phenomena. They use both quantitative and qualitative methods in their research. Quantitative research focuses on numbers or quantities. It uses measurable data to formulate facts and uncover patterns in research. In this type of research, one ends up with data reduced to numbers, which are analyzed using statistics. “Qualitative methods attempt to gather detailed, rich data allowing for an in-depth understanding of individual action in the context of social life”⁵¹¹. Under the qualitative method, participant observation is widely accepted by sociologists as a good strategy in order to gain close and intimate familiarity with a group of individuals and their practices. “Here, the investigator hangs out, works or lives with a group and organization or community and perhaps takes a direct part in their activities”⁵¹². Participant observation in-

511 A. GIDDENS, *Sociology*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2009, p. 50.

512 *Ibid.* See also K.M. DEWALT & B.R. DEWALT, *Participant Observation. A Guideline for Field Workers*, California, Altamira Press 2002, p. 14.

cludes informal interviews, direct observations, participation in the life of the group, individual, and group discussions.

We have found the method of participant observation coupled with interviews with the key figures as the best suited method for our purpose of studying the *Khrisht Bhakta* Movement. As our study has a particular focus on the religious domain of the *Khrisht Bhaktas*, we need to enter into the skin of the devotees by participating in their lives, especially in their religious rituals. Theo Sundermeier says, "Whoever wants more deeply to enter into another religion and culture must take part in its rites because rites are the architecture of a religion. Its signs must be perceived, in turn as objectively as possible, now, however with sympathy and the will to enter from the sign level into the one of symbolism"⁵¹³. He further states that this kind of study is possible only by going one step further from participant observation into what he calls a compassionate experience⁵¹⁴. Therefore, our methodology of participant observation includes appropriating some role in the ritual domain of the *Khrisht Bhakta* Movement to the extent of sharing a compassionate experience⁵¹⁵. Besides this, we also have included interviews with key figures, the study of written materials, and the analysis of the audio and video materials produced by the *āśram*. Thus, our methodology is mainly participant observation but complimented with interviews with leaders, the people involved, and the study of other supporting materials such as magazines published from the *āśram* and any other small write-ups about the Matridham *āśram* and the *Khrisht Bhakta* Movement.

3.1.3. Pilot Study and Preparation

A small scale observation and enquiry coupled with a short interview with Fr. (Svāmī) Anil Dev, the Guru of Matridham *āśram*, was conducted for five days in the last week of August 2008. I stayed in the *āśram* and participated in the weekly prayer meeting of the *Khrisht Bhaktas*. Likewise, I made it a point to conduct short informal interviews with some of the leaders and devotees. I had also collected some of the magazines (called *Prabhu ne Kaha*) published from the *āśram*, and the video cassettes of their activities of Lent, Easter, Christmas, etc. Before going into the field for further research, I studied these materials and the literature that was available to me and developed some concrete criteria for evaluating the material from my field research.

3.1.4. Personal Credentials and Limitations in Carrying out the Work

513 T. SUNDERMEIER, 'Aspects of Inter-religious Hermeneutics', in M. FREDERIKS, M. DIJKSTRA & A. HOUTEPEN (eds.), *Towards an Intercultural Theology. Essays in honour of Jan A.B. Jongeneel*, Bangalore, Centre for Contemporary Christianity, 2010, p. 86.

514 *Ibid.* p. 87.

515 The participative knowledge one gains needs not be completely the same when it is articulated. See E.L. SCHIEFFEL, 'Participation', in J. KRIENATH, J. SNOEK & M. STAUSBERG (eds.), *Theorizing Ritual. Issues, Topics, Approaches, Concepts*, Leiden/Boston, Brill, 2006, p. 617.

Although not an expert in conducting field study, my bachelor training in sociology came in handy. Moreover, the earlier training I had received in anthropology, especially the introduction in establishing a rapport with the people, the experience of visiting numerous villages in North India, conducting social awareness programmes in rural North India, living in the North Indian villages as part of the contextualised theological training, etc., became very useful. Besides having moderate theoretical knowledge, the experience of guiding the rural exposure programme for bachelor students of theology in Samanvaya Theological College for three years gave me some expertise and aptitude. Moreover, a Masters degree in Hindi literature⁵¹⁶ and the long-lived experience in several parts of North India contributed to enhancing my competence in the research project. Being an Indian and a Christian at the same time, and having lived in the several provinces of North India (Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra) for almost 25 years have given me much knowledge and insight into the North Indian religious practices of the people in general. Therefore, the culture of the people is not completely alien to me.

Establishing a genuine relationship as a matter of clearance is the most crucial step in participant observation⁵¹⁷. This phase was easily taken care of as I was introduced to the large gathering of the devotees on Sunday as a Catholic priest who was making a study and was interested in them. Being a priest was enough for the devotees to trust me and to come to me seeking my blessings, besides being eager to answer any of my enquiries. Thus, being a priest was an extra bonus in building a quick rapport with the devotees and gaining their confidence on the one hand. On the other hand, it enabled me to enter into a compassionate experience of the people⁵¹⁸. People came to me willingly with their stories and opened up themselves without hesitation. Moreover, being a priest helped me gain the confidence of the devotees and to acquire a role that functions within the culture of the observed⁵¹⁹. It also helped me in getting contact with the bishop, the parish priests, and other *āśram* gurus and staff for interviews and deep discussions.

At the same time, being a priest was also a limitation in the sense that people expected much from me. They also were eager to tell their stories, expectations, problems, and requests for prayers and blessings, which I gladly obliged. They

516 Hindi is the main language of people and the lingua franca for the most part of North India.

517 S.T. BRUYN, *The Human Perspective in Sociology. The Methodology of Participant Observation*, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1966, pp. 200-202. This step is all the more difficult when the researcher is from a cross-cultural background. But since I was Indian sharing the same culture, I had rather an easier entry to the world of devotees.

518 Where other researchers take time and wait (for months) for a key incident in order to gain the confidence of the people, the present researcher could gain it without delay. Presenting himself as a priest was enough for the people to have confidence in him. Living in the *āśram* and helping in the activities, (con)celebrating the liturgy, carrying the Eucharist for adoration and Benediction, guiding the monthly retreats, etc., was enough to present him as one of the staff members. Therefore, people rushed to him to touch his feet in order to receive blessings or to answer any questions he had.

519 BRUYN, *The Human Perspective in Sociology*, p.15. See also DEWALT & DEWALT, *Participant Observation*, p. 47.

were interested in narrating their stories, their experiences and expectations, etc., which were not always needed for my investigation. I had to give them my time and attention, which took a good amount of energy and time from the main task. Being surrounded by the devotees, all eagerly waiting for their turn to give his/her version, opinion, etc., prevented me sometimes from taking even “scratch notes” and I had to depend mostly on “head notes” for my reporting. Another encumbrance in gaining information was the general mentality of the rural population in India, i.e., many times they tell one what one wants to hear. I have also carried into the field my own bias of being a high caste Syrian Catholic priest belonging to a religious congregation, hailing from the state/province of Kerala.

Living in the Matridham *āśram* as a priest gave me an opportunity to take the role of a staff member in the *āśram*, which in turn resulted in gaining an insider’s view of the staff of the *āśram*. “Once we see how things look from inside a given group, we are likely to develop a better understanding not only of that group, but of the social processes that transcend the situation under study”⁵²⁰. It also helped in gaining the confidence of the devotees, *aguās* (local leaders), and the staff members of the *āśram*, especially the priests, who are guiding the movement. Above all, it provided me with an opportunity to make contact and build a rapport with the guru. It gave me the occasion for frequent informal interviews and discussions with him. He graciously handed over to me his personal diaries written earlier when the movement was still in its infancy. Through this sharing, I have a better insight into his vision concerning the movement.

Living in the *āśram* also enabled me to observe the rituals and faith practices of the devotees, both on Sundays and on weekdays. The *āśram* for the devotees is the holy place, pilgrim centre, and the nucleus of their faith. It is the centre around which the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement has grown. Therefore, it was the right place to base myself for the study of the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement. I was also given access to the archives, chronicles, letters, etc., of the *āśram*, which was helpful for my research. The service of the head catechist Mr. Girija was extended to me for visiting the villages and attending the prayer meetings in the villages.

The limitation of living in the *āśram* was that it was not possible to attend family prayer in the far off villages, since travelling back and forth to the distant villages was not feasible. Therefore, I limited my family prayer meetings to the nearby villages. However, I did attend one village prayer meetings in a distant village. Furthermore, since the villages are spread out I had to depend mostly on Mr. Girija as a guide in order to travel to the villages⁵²¹. While taking me to the village prayer meetings and houses, it is possible that he chose those villages and houses which were more vibrant, familiar, etc. for him.

520 GIDDENS, *Sociology*, p. 50. It is easier for an insider to gain substantial experience of that religious tradition. See H. WHITEHOUSE, *Models of Religiosity. A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission*, New York, Altamira Press, 2004, p. 23.

521 I have visited some villages without his assistance by joining an *aguā* or a priest.

Likewise, I conducted my study at a time when it was good weather for the cultivation of crops in the villages, therefore the prayer meetings both at villages and the *āśram* were attended by fewer people. Communication with the older women of some rural areas became a problem, as they could not communicate in Hindi but only in their dialect. So my discussions in such cases were not as lengthy and deep as I wished.

Another impediment was that most of the time, the devotees were not able to give expressions to their faith. They were not able to articulate the reasons for their rituals and practices. Therefore, I had to make conclusions based on my observations. Moreover, although I had lived in the North Indian context, my familiarity with Hindu religious practices is less compared to my knowledge of Christian practices.

3.1.5. *Cautions*

Living in the *āśram*, joining all its activities, and taking part in the rituals of the devotees at home and in the villages have not made me over sympathetic. I have taken care not to fall prey to over identification or overly strong rapports. While accompanying the devotees and the *āśram* staff, I have tried to maintain a “detached attachment”. While showing empathy to the needs of the devotees I have been careful in upholding the distance needed for my objectivity.

In the presentation of my findings, I have taken necessary caution to avoid any partisan reporting. I have tried to keep the necessary aloofness adequate for objectivity while giving the descriptive picture of the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement. At the same time, I have tried to illustrate the details as far as possible, avoiding any possible distortion, while maintaining an objective style. Even when there was need to record and interpret the subjective meaning, I have tried to work it accurately within the objective framework. I was careful not to glorify the rituals on the one hand, and not to discard the importance of even the simple practices on the other hand.

3.1.6. *Duration and Modi Operandi in the Field*

My main research was short but intense. My stay in the field was limited to three months, i.e., from of July 2010 (08-07-2010) to October 2010 (10-10-2010). I made Matridham *āśram* my base camp during the entire duration of my main field research. Rather than remaining clinically removed, my research necessitated an involvement with the people and participation in their religious practices⁵²². Primarily, I have collected my data by participating in and observing the activities in the *āśram* and in the villages. In the *āśram* I followed the *āśram* time-table and concelebrated (sometimes giving homilies, etc.) the daily Eucharist which

522 Cf. E. BARKER, ‘The Scientific Study of Religion? You Must be Joking!’, in L.L. DAWSON (ed.), *Cults and New Religious Movements. A Reader*, Malden/Oxford, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003, p. 23.

was attended by some devotees. After the Eucharist, some of the devotees came to me for prayers and blessings. I always obliged them and stayed for some time talking to them. Thereafter, I had time for preparation to go to villages or to interview the staff of the *āśram*.

At noon, I went to the villages to attend the prayer meetings. On my arrival in the villages the devotees welcomed me (sometimes with garland or a gift, or with the washing of hands and legs, etc.) and immediately the prayer meeting commenced. During the prayer meeting, I also read the Bible and gave rather lengthy homilies. At the conclusion of the prayer meeting many devotees, especially the sick, queued up to receive my blessings. The devotees who were all eager to tell their stories, experiences, requests for prayers, etc., then surrounded me. I made use of this time to collect the data I was looking for. I could only make “scratch notes” or, as mentioned before, sometimes only “head notes” at this time. This informal discussion lasted for one or two hours. Thereafter, the devotees left and I sat down for a cup of tea with members of the family where the prayer meeting was held and the head catechist. This provided me with yet another opportunity to have more extensive discussions and enquiries. The villages I visited and joined prayer meetings included Lalpur, in the house of Sham Dulari; Munari, in the house of Suchit; Madwa, in the house of Mittar; Badka Chuppepur, in the house of Rajesh Patel; Chotte Chuppepur, in the house of Sushela; Hatia Baksada, in the house of Radheshyam; Sagapali, in the house of Dehendu; Kajoori, (name of the house holder missed); Ekla, in the house of Ratan Dulari; Saksepur, in the house of Rajpati Patel; Barsana, in the house of Prem Sagar; Koily Shukravarha, in the house of Shanti; Bitlapur, in the house of Durga Gupta; and Karouth, in the house of Asaram.

On my return to the *āśram*, I made detailed narrative field notes of my observations and then either joined the *āśram* time table or visited one or two families to attend their family prayer. In the families, I had a similar welcome, this time more personal, sometimes with the washing of my feet. There, too, I had to give the homily, pray for them, and give blessings. I was sent off with gifts (money), a small part of which I kept and the rest returned thankfully. Such occasions were more useful for deeper interaction and thus to collect more information about the movement. The important personal interactions for longer hours (minimum one hour) of informal interview included time spent with Mr. Banarsi at Murdaha Bazar, who was a tailor by profession but became a doctor because of his faith in Christ, and who gives medicine to the patients in the name of Christ and preaches the word of God in *āśram* on Sundays⁵²³, Meena from Satwa, Urmila Patel and Meena from Belvania, Girija the head catechist, Meena Kumari from Sarsuam. Others included Kanchan, Manjari, Anil Kumar, Kallu and Shanta Prasad who frequented the *āśram* very often.

523 On average, he has 500 to 600 patients daily. He hardly spends one minute with each patient. The same medicine, i.e., a spoonful of holy water poured into the mouth and one small packet of medicine powder, is given to all while chanting the name of Christ. He claims to have treated even cancer patients. People from all over the area flock to him.

Sundays and second Saturdays were busier than any other days. Those were the days when the devotees came to the *āśram* in large numbers to attend the prayer meeting. I attended the full programme and found time for discussion with many more people. This was the time when I could meet different people: from far, from near, urban, rural, regular devotees, first timers, etc. I interacted with them, and listened to them, often many people surrounding me with their stories. On such occasions, I could hardly find any time to record any details about their names and villages. Even after the prayer meeting was over, I could meet some more devotees who came from distant villages and who therefore could not go back to their village but stayed in the *āśram*. By the time I came back to the room to make some notes it was invariably late in the evening. I was also lucky that the celebration of the *gurupūrṇimā* (details will be given later), a day when the devotees pay a visit to their guru in the *āśram*, was at the time of my presence there.

The monthly retreats were also an occasion for deeper interaction with the devotees. Since the devotees stayed in the campus I had the opportunity to talk to them for longer hours. I also joined the team who guided the retreat and gave homilies and talks. After giving them a homily from the stage, I interacted with them more closely as it was much easier for the devotees to speak freely about themselves and it was much easier for me to ask questions.

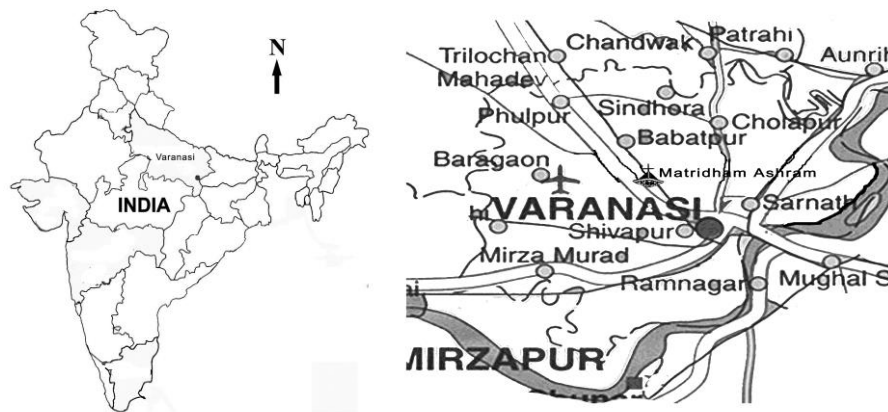
I also had time to interview every staff member of the *āśram* and had several formal and informal interviews with Anil Dev. I also interviewed Raphy Manjaly, the Bishop of Varanasi Diocese, and Fr. Abhishiktanand, the provincial superior of the IMS congregation. I interviewed all the staff members in the Matri-dham *āśram*: Svāmī (Fr.) Vineet, Fr. James Selvaraj, Fr. Ranjit, Sr. Lucretia, Sr. Vincentia, Ms. Ashirvadam and Mr. Girija. Several IMS members associated with the *āśram* and the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement were also interviewed. They were: Fr. Anand, who helped me by checking and correcting the draft on historical parts of the movement, Fr. Jerome the Vicar Provincial, Fr. Deendayal, Fr. Premraj, Fr. Rakesh, and Br. Rajesh. I interviewed many diocesan priests: Fr. Roque, Fr. Santhosh, Fr. Wilfred Louis, Fr. Rojan, Fr. William, Fr. Louis Braggs, Fr. Simon P, Fr. Prince, Fr. Manuel D'Cunha, Msgr. Ivan Joseph, and Fr. Casper. I visited the other two *āśrams* (Yesu Dham and Shanti Dham) opened by the diocese to cater to the *Khrist Bhaktas*. I stayed in those *āśrams*, participated in their Sunday prayer meetings, and interacted with the devotees. I interviewed the gurus of those *āśrams*, namely, Fr. Iswaranand and Fr. Aloysius, and the other staff members of the *āśrams*. These include: Fr. Yagappan, Fr. Sonelal and Sr. Lissy Maria FCC from Shanti Dham *āśram* and Sr. Diya, Sr. Louisana and Sr. Assumption from Yesu Dham *Āśram*. I also interviewed Sr. Sraddha who lived in the Yesu Dham *āśram* from its beginning until 2009. I visited the parishes nearby where the devotees frequent, namely, the cathedral parish of Varanasi, the parishes at Mawaiya and Benipur, and interviewed the parish priests and the nuns working in those parishes. Moving away from the Varanasi civil district, I went to the interior village parish of Mariabad in the civil district of Gazipur and attended the

prayer meeting there to have a general idea about how the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement is working in places other than Varanasi. I also interviewed Pastor David and Pastor K.V. Abraham from the Church of Banaras.

The interviews were conducted in a friendly manner with openness and free exchange of views. The interviews with the leaders were all one-to-one and face-to-face in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. All these interviews were semi-structured allowing sufficient space for spontaneity and, at the same time, limiting ourselves to the pre-planned topics.

When I did not have the opportunity to go to the villages, I made use of the time to read the chronicle of the *āśram*, the personal diary of Anil Dev, the papers presented about the *āśram* and the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement by Anil Dev and other small write-ups about the *āśram*. I also could go through the chronicles of the other *āśrams* and the chronicles of the convent in the Yesu Dham.

3.2. Varanasi⁵²⁴



Varanasi is situated at the west bank of the River Ganges in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh and is considered by Hindus in general as the religious capital of India. Located at 780 km south east of Delhi, this city is also known by two other names: Kāśī (Kashi) and Banaras. The rays of the morning sun spread across the river and strike the face of this city, which the people call Kāśī, the luminous, the city of lights⁵²⁵. It is considered as one of the most important holy and pilgrim cities of the Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains. It is said that every year on average, one million pilgrims visit the city. The very name of Kāśī evokes immeasurable

⁵²⁴ The outline map of India is accessed from:

<http://www.freeusandworldmaps.com/html/Countries/Asia%20Countries/IndiaPrint.html> on 08.03.2011 and the map of Varanasi is acceded from internet <http://www.cultureholidays.com/varanasi/map.htm> on 09.07.2013.

⁵²⁵ Cf. D.L. ECK, *Benaras. City of Lights*, New Delhi, Penguin Books, 1983, p. 3.

affection and reverence in the minds of Hindus of all categories⁵²⁶. This is one of the oldest cities of India. As far as the continuity of a classical cultural tradition is concerned, it surpasses Rome and Athens and holds a unique position among all the civilized centres of the world⁵²⁷.

The banks of the Ganges at Varanasi have 70 *ghāṭs* (steps leading to the water) where daily *pūjā* (sacrifice) is offered. These 70 *ghāṭs*, reaching like roots into the river, bring thousands of worshippers and pilgrims down to the river to bathe at dawn⁵²⁸. Some *ghāṭs* are meant for the burial of the dead and for performing the last rites. Varanasi is also a city of temples, and almost all the streets have a temple. There are thousands of temples and idols in the city. Some of the temples are named after other great pilgrim centres like Rameshwaram (in South India), Dwarka (in Western India), Puri (Eastern India), and Badrinath (North India), and so it is said that merely by visiting Kāśī one automatically gains the benefit of visiting all other sacred places.

The pilgrims come to Varanasi all through the year. The ashes of the cremated ancestors are brought to Ganges and poured into the Ganges after the rituals performed at the *ghāṭ*. The *ghāṭs* are always crowded with pilgrims, many of whom will be performing *pūjā* or *yajña* (sacrifice) to propitiate for some sin or as a thanksgiving for deliverance from some immediate calamity. One can observe the hundreds of astrologers sitting at the banks of the river who, in exchange for money, predict the future, and many pilgrims visit them. A large number of pilgrims come to the Ganges to offer *pinḍās* (balls of wheat or rice) to the spirits of their ancestors or other relatives who have died but who have not been released⁵²⁹. After performing the rituals at the *ghāṭs*, the pilgrims visit, most importantly, the Vishwanath temple, which is considered as one of the holiest temples of India because it is in this temple the *vyotirling* (*ling* of light) of Śiva is enshrined; a simple glance of which is considered as soul cleansing and merits more than any visits to hundreds of other temples⁵³⁰.

A pilgrimage to Varanasi at least once in a life-time is the cherished dream of every Hindu. They believe that bathing in the Ganges washes away sins, and dying in Kāśī enables the release of one's soul from the entanglement of rebirths. According to the Hindu faith, Yam, the demon of death, is not allowed within the city limits of Kāśī. Therefore "death which is feared elsewhere, here [it] is welcomed as a long-expected guest"⁵³¹. For this reason, it is not strange to notice

526 Cf. S. SINHA & B. SARASWATI, *Ascetics of Kashi. An Anthropological Exploration*, Varanasi, N.K. Bose Memorial Foundation, 1978, p. 1.

527 *Ibid.* It is believed that the city is 2,500 years old.

528 Cf. ECK, *Banaras*, p. 3.

529 The Hindus believe that after death, the spirit of the human being still remains in the world. So, before the completion of one year after death, the relatives come to the holy place, preferably to the Ganges in Varanasi, to offer *pinḍa* which will pacify the soul so that it will not linger in this world any longer.

530 There are 12 *vyotirling* shrines in India.

531 ECK, *Banaras*, p. 325. See also K.S. SRIVASTAVA, *Kashi The Sacred City of Lord Shiva*, New Delhi, A.P.H. Publishing Corporation, 2007, p. 139.

people bringing to Varanasi severely sick people and the elderly to have a holy or peaceful death.

Varanasi represents both the head and heart of Hinduism. Although Hinduism has various sub-sects, practically all of them consider the greatness of this city. No matter which sect they belong to, all Hindus long to bathe in the Ganges especially on festival occasions such as the new moon, the eleventh lunar day, the lunar or solar eclipses, and other days. Most of the schools of Hindu philosophy and Hindu organizations are represented here. In Banaras live those authoritative men, high priests and theologians, well versed in scriptures, whose interpretations and decisions control Hindu religious and social polity. This city is also a centre where many great writers, poets, religious leaders, artists, and gurus flourished. Sages like Buddha, Mahāvīr(ā), and Śaṅkar(ā) have come here to spread their teachings.

3.2.1. Matridham Āśram

Msgr. Jos A.E. Fernandes purchased a plot of land of 8 acres and 77 cents. It had a small building and a wall and was on the roadside in Chandmari, at Varanasi, 7 km (North West) from the railway station on Varanasi Sindhora Road. Here, he started an *āśram* in 1954 and named it Matridham, which means the abode of Mother⁵³². By 1955, 20 mud-huts were constructed, spread out in the form of a lotus with a small chapel in the middle. This campus was used as the novitiate for the newly-founded religious congregation called the Indian Missionary Society (IMS). In 1960, this novitiate was shifted to the mother house of the IMS in Christ Nagar⁵³³. Later, the IMS opened a “Catholic Information Centre” and, later, their communication centre in the small house at the roadside. The *āśram* was then practically left unattended, though sometimes used for conferences, seminars, etc. The mud houses gradually fell down and were removed.

Following his return from Spain after his studies, Fr. Dayanand developed Matridham into a proper Indian *āśram*⁵³⁴. From 1975 onwards, he took the responsibility to initiate a green revolution in the campus and made it a green forest conducive for contemplative life. He lived in a small hut as an Indian monk and converted Matridham into a centre of spirituality. At the same time, he also initiated some small social work projects for the villagers in the neighbourhood⁵³⁵.

532 Jos A.E. Fernandes was the then superior general of the newly-founded religious congregation the Indian Missionary Society. For details see the chronicles of the *āśram*. Most of the information about this *āśram* and the *Khrist Bhakta* movement is from the author’s interview with Anil Dev and other members of the *āśram*, the IMS Congregation, and the author’s personal observations in the *āśram*.

533 The mother house of the IMS at Christ Nagar is just 1 km away from the *āśram*.

534 Cf. *Chaitanya Dhara July 2010*, 3, Varanasi, North Indian Ashram Aikya, 2010, p. 3.

535 In 1976 the philosophy students of IMS stayed in the *āśram* together with Fr. Deendayal for one year. They stayed in the *āśram* and went to the mother house at Christ Nagar to attend classes there. After one year, philosophy students were shifted to their mother house in Christ Nagar and the third year students were moved to Matridham. Later, the students came to the *āśram* only for one month in the third year, a practice still continued.

The Matridham developed into a proper *āśram* when *Svāmī* (Fr.) Iswar Prasad took over as the guru in 1983. Before moving into Matridham, he had lived as the founding guru of the Khristpanti *āśram* at Banaras⁵³⁶. He was already known for his efforts of inculturation and retreat preaching. Earlier, he had started a pilot seminary⁵³⁷ together with Dheeranand Bhatt of Allahabad diocese and Kurian Valiyamangalam MST. In the Khristpanti *āśram* he had introduced prayer services for the neighbouring Hindus of the city. The prayer services included the singing of *bhajans*⁵³⁸, reading from the Bible, preaching of the Word of God, and intercessory prayers. When he was transferred to Christ Nagar as the rector, Fr. Deendayal took over as the head of the Khristpanti *āśram* and continued the prayer services for the people there. *Svāmī* Iswar Prasad lived in Matridham *āśram* for ten years, built some huts, constructed a chapel and fostered it into a spiritual centre for the renewal of the Church in North India⁵³⁹. He offered courses on spirituality and Indian forms of meditation, conducted liturgy with inculturated elements and arranged retreats for religious and priests. Slowly, nuns, religious, and priests came to Matridham *āśram*.

In April 1992, Fr. Vinayanand took over as the guru of the *āśram* and Fr. Deendayal joined him. Fr. Deendayal started small healing services with adoration of the Blessed Sacrament at noon in the *āśram* for the sick and poor *musahars* (called as *mūṣahar* also)⁵⁴⁰ who could not afford medical expenses. He conducted it in the *āśram* chapel normally on Sundays and sometimes two or three days a week, attended by 5 to 8 people, and the services lasted for two hours. Fr. Deendayal was transferred to Khandwa after one year, but the prayer services continued under the guidance of Fr. Vinayanand. From 1993 to 1994 they conducted night vigils on all second Saturdays. These night vigils were not intended primarily for the sick (*musahars*), but as part of the promise made at the charismatic convention in the Cathedral church, the details of which we shall discuss shortly. From 1994, they changed the night vigils into day-long monthly *satsaṅgs* or prayer meetings. The *Musahars* became an insignificant group and people from several other castes became the majority. These second Saturday prayer meetings were the sessions meant for the *Khrist Bhaktas* and it was conducted in the chapel/*mandir*. In 1995, *Svāmī* Anil Dev became the guru of the *āśram* and the proclamation of the Gospel got prominence in the agenda of the *āśram* and it became “a place of sharing faith in Christ with the ordinary people”⁵⁴¹.

536 This *āśram* belongs to the diocese of Varanasi, but was started by Iswar Prasad IMS. At present it is not functioning as an Indian *āśram* but taken care by the nuns.

537 The pilot seminary was intended to give the future priests inculturated training with stress on simplicity, Indian methods of prayer, etc.

538 *Bhajan* is a hymn meant to be repeated again and again.

539 I. PRASAD, ‘To be Authentically Indian Authentically Christian’, in S. PAINADATH (ed.), *Solitude and Solidarity. Ashrams of Catholic Initiative*, Delhi, Ashram Aikya, 2003, p. 15.

540 One of the most marginalized sections of the society in this area.

541 PRASAD, ‘To be Authentically Indian Authentically Christian’, p. 15.

Like any other Catholic *āśrams*, Matridham upholds the values of openness, hospitality, simplicity, and silence. Many people from different parts of India come as seekers to this *āśram*. It has several small huts where the seekers spend their time in prayer and silence. Matridham has a regular timetable for the seekers. Many religious and priests spent their retreats and renewals in this *āśram*. It is also a place for those who like to spend some time in complete silence, fasting, and prayer.

At the centre of the *āśram* stands the chapel constructed in an Indian temple style (see the outline map of the *āśram* in appendix 1). As one enters the *āśram* from the main road, on the right hand side stands the *darśan bhavan* (a house for gaining a glimpse of the Divine), where perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place, where people at any time can come and spend time in prayer⁵⁴². On the opposite side of the *darśan bhavan* stands the grotto of Our Lady which was blessed on November 8, 2002, which now attracts the devotion of many people. As one walks further, the big open hall called *satsaṅg bhavan* stands on the right side where the Sunday gathering and second Saturday gatherings are held. Initially built in June 2000, the *satsaṅg bhavan* was small and was several times enlarged before it took its final shape with the flooring completed and blessed on October 6, 2006. The *satsaṅg bhavan* has a rear room called *vardān* (blessings) where the staff of the *āśram* gather for adoration daily from 09.00 to 10.00 am. Thereafter, one or other staff member continues the intercessory prayers till evening. During the public *satsaṅg*, while one preacher speaks on the stage, other speakers sit in *vardān* and intercede for the speaker. The *sādhnā bhavan* (house for spiritual practices), which stands opposite of the *satsaṅg bhavan* is meant for conducting classes and monthly retreats and was built and blessed in October 2007. Behind the *mandir* a dome-shaped house for the purpose of meditation and giving classes was built and blessed on July 16, 2003. This house is called *dhyān bhavan* (meditation hall) and on weekdays, it is used for celebrating the Eucharist. The *sāntvānā* (consolation room) is where the sick people are taken for special intercessory prayer and this stands closer to the entrance⁵⁴³. The *āśram* has an *aśrey* (shelter), a shelter-home for mentally ill people started on March 30, 2006. Besides all these, the *āśram* has several small huts and other facilities for those who come for retreats and other spiritual renewal, which is usually occupied by nuns, religious brothers, and priests.

The *āśram* started a Bible distribution ministry in June 2005, and from December of the same year, the intercession ministry by telephone also began. A television serial called *nūtan dhāra* (fresh stream) was aired on TV from Ranchi, the capital of the state of Jharkhand, in August 2007. It was launched on a national channel called “Sadhana” in 2008, and in the same year it was telecast from “Zee Jagaran”, which is comparatively a more popular channel. It is telecast on

542 The perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was started on November 10, 2000, at the end of the Annual Convention preached by Thomas Paul.

543 One or two people in the *āśram* are always available to the *Bhaktas* for counselling, listening, or praying for them.

Saturdays and Sundays. The *āśram* began a ministry of collecting food grains from the *Bhaktas* and distributing it to the poorest and most deserving families of 10 villages in 2008 called *ann dān sēva* (service of giving food grains to the poor as alms),⁵⁴⁴ which is done intensively during lent.

3.3. The *Khrist Bhakta* Movement

3.3.1. The Background

Svāmī Anil Dev and Chotebhai, a layman and the national president of the Catholic Union, staying at Bareli *āśram* in Uttar Pradesh (U.P.), were involved in the charismatic movement in North India in the 1980s. Chotebhai was from a royal family in Kanpur but left his family and came to live at the ecumenical *āśram* managed by the Capuchins at Bareli where Fr. Augustine Deenbandhu, OfmCap was the guru. Chotebhai was the U.P. youth regional secretary and the director of the U.P. youth centre for several years. Anil Dev, as a regent, had worked with him in 1981 as an assistant for the faith formation in the youth centre. Chotebhai had got himself involved in charismatic renewal from the time of its arrival in India in 1976. At that time, the movement was more of an elitist and urban movement with prestige being attached to it. In 1981 and 1982 Anil Dev together with Chotebhai conducted charismatic retreats for the youth of U.P.

From 1991 to 1993, Anil Dev worked as the director of the communication centre run by the IMS congregation. The centre was run in the same campus as that of the Matridham *āśram*. Fr. Anand was in charge of the Catholic Information Centre, which was also in the same campus, though he was living in the Mother House at Christ Nagar. Although Anil Dev was the director of the communication centre, he continued working with youth and, together with Fr. Anand, he conducted several programmes for evangelization. Later, in 1992-93 when charismatic retreats were arranged in Agra, Lucknow, and Bareli, Anil Dev was invited to preach in Hindi, which the other preachers could not speak as they came from the Divine Retreat Centre, Pota, Kerala⁵⁴⁵. During the retreat, Anil Dev felt a calling to the ministry of preaching the Word and, in his words, “experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the power of the Word of God”. He was then convinced about the working of the Spirit in such retreats, and spent more time in conducting them. Fr. Anand and Fr. Prem Antony were also associated in conducting these charismatic renewal programmes all over North India.

544 Although it is done by the *āśram*, the collecting of food grains and distribution is carried out through *Asrey* the centre for the mentally challenged, probably to keep the *āśram* free from social involvement.

545 The Divine Retreat Centre at Pota is a Catholic charismatic retreat centre, run by the Vincentian Congregation. This centre was started as a popular retreat mission centre in 1977, but later became the centre of charismatic prayer with the arrival of Fr. Mathew Naikanamparambil in 1987. The centre became quite popular and people in large numbers started to attend the renewal programme. This centre is allegedly the largest retreat centre in the world. Since 1990, 10 million people have attended retreat here. Weekly retreats are held back-to-back non-stop throughout the year.

A Catholic prayer group was active in the Catholic Cathedral in Varanasi City⁵⁴⁶, under the guidance of Fr. Roque, the then parish priest. Fr. Ranveer and Fr. Devdas used to lead and conduct the prayer services. The international Protestant organization called “Youth with a Mission” also was active in the city of Varanasi and their leaders came into contact with Fr. Roque, *Svāmī* Anil Dev, and Fr. Anand. This group joined the prayer in the cathedral many times. Fr. Roque invited Anil Dev to preach and conduct it. Slowly, the Protestants withdrew from the prayer group. During these days a proposal for conducting training in the charismatic way of renewal for the Catholics of North India was proposed by Anil Dev. Accordingly, in October 1993, a one-week retreat and training camp for Catholic charismatic animators of Uttar Pradesh was organized in the Matridham *āśram* by Anil Dev, Fr. Vinayanad, the then guru of Matridham *āśram*, and Fr. Anand⁵⁴⁷. This camp was attended by around 30 people from all over the province of Uttar Pradesh who were mostly catechists of the mission stations sent by their bishops.

Anil Dev and the team wanted to give the participants an experience of charismatic prayer meeting in a real charismatic convention. Therefore, they requested Fr. Roque to arrange at the cathedral a convention open for all. Fr. Roque left no stone unturned to make the three-day convention a big success. He and his team at the parish made a lot of publicity with banners and notices. The participants of the training camp were divided into smaller groups and spent time in adoration, intercession, praise and worship, singing, etc., while the main speakers were preaching the Word of God. Though the main speakers at the convention were Anil Dev and Vinayanand, there were many others who shared the responsibility. Fr. Roque, Sr. Velankanny, Mrs. Ashirvadam, (late) Mr. Johny⁵⁴⁸, Mr. Raphael, and Fr. Anand were all involved in it. The result was that it was attended by a large gathering including some priests, many nuns, Catholic lay people, Protestants, and Evangelicals. The convention was held in the evening hours. Anil Dev considers this convention as the most important event and breakthrough in the birth of *Khrish Bhakta* Movement. After the convention some of the leaders from the villages, such as Omkar and Jeevandas (their contribution will be presented later), came to meet Anil Dev and wanted to associate with him. Many people who attended the convention were already evangelized in several degrees by the Protestants and Evangelicals. At the end of the convention, it was decided to conduct regular night vigils on all second Saturdays which would be held in Matridham *āśram*.

546 The prayer group was started in March 1993 by Sr. Velankanny and Mr. Rapheal D’Costa together with Fr. Joseph Topno. They decided to have it every Friday which was attended by (late) Mr. Johny and Mr. Mathew along with their families. Under the guidance of the Parish priest Fr. Roque D’Costa and with the leadership of Frs. Ranveer and Devdas this group continued its prayer meetings in the Cathedral.

547 RAKESH, ‘Origin Growth and Possibilities of the *Khrish Bhakta* Movement’, *Kristu Jyoti* 22, 2006, 3, p. 187.

548 (Late) Mr. Johny helped the *Khrish Bhakta* movement in its initial days. He was gifted with counselling skills and gave solid counselling.

3.3.2. Birth and Growth of the Movement

The second Saturday night vigil announced in the convention now had to take place. There were many difficulties getting it off the ground. Christians living in the city did not show much interest in it, and for those who showed interest, the *āśram* was away from the city centre, which made arriving for the night vigils difficult. Only Vinayanand, Anil Dev, and occasionally Fr. Anand were there to guide it. Still it got started and some nuns from the nearby convents and some Catholics from the city area attended it. Fr. Deendayal had been collecting sick people and bringing them to the *āśram* for prayer even before the start of the second Saturday vigil. Now he brought them for the Saturday night vigils also. Some of the sick people would even sleep in the *āśram*. After the departure of Fr. Deendayal (who stayed in the *āśram* only for one year at this time) the Sunday prayer meeting was led by Fr. Vinayanand.

Eventually, the second Saturday night vigils were attended by more poor/sick people of the neighbouring rural area, as the number of Christians from the city dwindled. It was in 1994 that non-Christians other than the sick and *musahars* started to attend the prayer in the *āśram*. Sr. Lucretia remembers how after a Saturday night vigil all the people departed and the staff of the *āśram* had gone to take rest, when a group of about 15 people from villages came in for prayer and requested Sr. Lucretia to conduct prayer for them. She recalls vividly how when she told them that the prayer was over, one of them named Satyaprakash pleading with her, “please do not send us back, please pray for us too”. The staff came back and conducted prayer for them. On the following Sunday, some 20 people came and the *āśram* staff conducted prayers for them. On the following second Saturday, around 50 non-Christians attended the night vigil and for the Catholic missionaries it was a big event. 50 people of other faiths (though initially evangelized by the Protestants and Evangelicals) joining their prayer was considered as great success. Soon it was realized that the night time was not suitable for the villagers. Since the city folks were reduced in great number, in 1994 they changed the night vigils into monthly day-long *satsaṅgs* (prayer meetings) with preaching, intercessory prayers, giving witnesses, and adoration. At the same time, the Sunday *satsaṅgs* also increased in numbers.

In March 1995, Anil Dev became the guru of the *āśram* and the Sunday prayer meetings grew in size and more non-Christians started to attend it. With the build-up of devotees, they had to shift the *satsaṅgs* from the chapel to a temporarily-built shed outside, which had to be enlarged several times. Br. Sanchit made all the arrangements and shared the major responsibility of enlarging the shed, the daily running of the *āśram* and taking care of the needs of the *Bhaktas*, while Sr. Lucretia shared the major work of conducting the praise and worship, intercessory prayers, and sharing the Word of God. The second Saturday night vigils became a distinctive feature for the devotees and still continue as the special feature of the *āśram* and the movement with day-long preaching, singing of *bhajans*,

witness, adoration and healing services (the Sunday following the second Saturday does not have the prayer meeting).

The movement soon spread to surrounding areas and became a movement of non-Christians, who are now called devotees of Christ (*Khrist Bhaktas*). Initially, people from the surrounding villages such as Dandupur, Kanaudih, Sarsawa, Lodhan, and Holapur came in large numbers. In 1996, the second Saturday *satsaṅgs* were attended by around 3000 people while the Sunday *satsaṅgs* (limited to two hours) were attended by around 700 people⁵⁴⁹. Later, people from other villages, blocks, and even the neighbouring civil districts of Uttar Pradesh such as Allahabad, Azamgarh, Jaunpur, Gazhipur, Ballia, Bodhim, Mirzapur, and Chandauli, and from the neighbouring civil districts of Bihar such as Bhabua, Kaimur, Bhojpur, Rohtas and Patna also joined.

In 1997, for the first time a charismatic convention led by Fr. Mathew Nainkanamparambil and the team from Pota, Kerala, was arranged in the *āśram* as a preparation for Christmas. This convention was conducted in the open field and attended by around 10,000 people and, from then on, this convention became an annual hallmark of the movement. This convention marked the growth of the movement, the number of devotees grew, and the Sunday gatherings thereafter increased to around 4,000 to 5,000. Anil Dev firmly believes that the years between 1995 to 2000 are the years of God's special blessings on the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement and the time of its significant growth. At present, on a normal Sunday, around 4,000 to 5,000 *Khrist Bhaktas* attend the *satsaṅg*, and on second Saturdays and on special occasions like *Gurupūrṇimā*⁵⁵⁰, the number of *Bhaktas* is over 6000.

Though most *Khrist Bhaktas* are the rural folk, a good number of urban and suburban people also have become devotees. The majority are Hindus, though some Muslims also are part of this group. Among the Hindus, people from all *varṇas*⁵⁵¹, have become the devotees⁵⁵². Though initially it was the *dalits*⁵⁵³ who attended the Sunday meetings in the *āśram*, as the movement grew, members from other *varṇas* became the majority. It should be noted that mostly in North India, it is the *dalits* who are converted to Christianity but in this Movement, the

549 Cf. the personal diary of Fr. Anil Dev July1, 1996.

550 *Pūrṇimā* means the effulgent full moon and the guru is the one who removes the darkness of ignorance from the heart. So it is the day to remember the guru and take initiation into spiritual life.

551 The numbers of *varṇas* are four (*Brahmaṇs*, *Kṣatriyās*, *Vaiśās* and *Śūdrās*), or five when those outside (*pañcama*) are included as a category. The number of castes which are in fact known as *jāti*, including sub-castes, is numerous and cannot be counted, as their number grows even today. Both *varṇ* and *jāti* are hierarchical orderings. The ranking among the four *varṇas* are fixed, while *jāti* have a lot of fluidity. In the *Brahmaṇic* tradition the *Brahmaṇ* is the highest ranked while in the Buddhist tradition, the *Kṣatriyās* are the first. But, in general, the *Brahmaṇs* rank as highest and the so called 'untouchables' rank as the lowest. It is impossible to rank the *jātis* on a single scale of highest to lowest.

552 The term caste is the equivalent to the Sanskrit term *jāti* used in the Indian sub continent to refer to "race", "breed", or "lineage". *Jātis* are the sub-divisions of the four basic *varṇas*, a formal demarcation on the basis of the type of profession or activity.

553 *Dalits* were earlier called *Camārs* who occupy an utterly degraded position in the village life, and are regarded with loathing and disgust by people of higher *varṇas*. See G.W. BRIGGS, *The Chamars*, Calcutta, Association Press, 1920, p. 20.

Hindus of higher *varṇas* have become the devotees. The *Khrist Bhaktas* at present are a real mixture of all *varṇas* including the *Brahmaṇs*, *Kṣatriyās Vaiśās* and *Śūdrās*. The *dalits* are also part of the movement. Overall, the majority of devotees are more or less the OBCs (other backward castes).⁵⁵⁴ Nevertheless, people belonging to the general category of *Brahmaṇs* (having surnames such as Mishra, Pandey)⁵⁵⁵, *Kṣatriyās* (Singh, Takur, Rai) *Vaiśās* (Shrivastava, Gupta), and people belonging to OBCs (Yadav, Patel, Varma, Vishwakarma, Jaiswal, Rajbar, Bhar) and Scheduled Castes and *Camārs*, (Paswan, Bharti, Bhaskar, Rav, Chouhan, Jatav, Nat and so on), are present in the movement⁵⁵⁶.

3.4. Events and Agents behind the Birth and Growth of the Movement

Various events and efforts of several people have contributed to the birth and growth of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement. We provide here a deep study and a closer interaction of all the factors responsible for the inception and growth of the Movement.

3.4.1. The First Charismatic Convention Conducted in the Cathedral

One of the immediate reasons for the opening up of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement is the first charismatic convention conducted at the Cathedral church, Varanasi in October 1993. This convention became almost like a “magna charta”, whereby Anil Dev became sought after by the people. Until then, Catholic priests, especially the IMS community, had ventured into the village with their evangelizing efforts, but nobody came seeking for them. Many Evangelicals and Protestants who attended the convention did not even know that it was a Catholic convention since the Catholics in North India did not have such conventions as a custom. Some of the people looked for those who conducted it, came to Anil Dev, and wanted to be associated with him. Among them were Omkar and Jeevandas, two of the most important leaders of the people, and who we have made mention of earlier. Their association became so strong that Anil Dev cherishes Omkar as his own son. Omkar took Anil Dev to preach in several villages located about 10 to 12 kms towards the north of the *āśram*, which he was well acquainted with, while Jeevandas took him to the eastern side of the *āśram*. These leaders had good contact in the villages and had a great following. Jeevandas, though 90% blind, had a good rapport with the people from several villages and brought them to the *āśram*. He was also a man gifted with healing powers. Omkar, however, decided to withdraw from the Catholics and the

554 Based on the social and economic condition the people are classified as scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward class (OBC). The OBCs are described as socially and educationally backward.

555 The surnames have many regional variations. A particular surname may fall in higher *varṇa* in one region and lower in another.

556 According to the general understanding there are at least 64 sub-castes in Scheduled Castes.

āśram after four or five years and joined a Protestant group and later established his own church and became a pastor.

3.4.2. *The Social and Evangelization Apostolate led by Fr. Veerendra*

Over several years, the IMS community had been active in and around Varanasi and especially around the *āśram* with their social work. Fr. Veerendra, one of the senior members of the IMS congregation and one of its pioneers, had already established a good rapport in 110 villages and formed “self help groups” called *alp bacat yojānā* (small saving scheme) in several of them. He had visualized 12 small houses in the name of 12 apostles in 12 villages around the IMS mother-house in Christ Nagar for evangelising the area⁵⁵⁷. As part of this plan, he opened 4 houses in the following four villages: Lodhan, Kanudih, Murdaha-Benipur, and Deshnipur.

He requested the IMS priest-professors⁵⁵⁸ and IMS brothers living in the mother house to move to the village houses. The mother house had several staff members since it was the administrative and formation centre of the congregation. Fr. Deendayal volunteered to move to one of the village houses (Kanaudih) together with two brothers⁵⁵⁹. He stayed in the village house and went to the mother house in Christ Nagar to give classes while the two brothers visited the villages. Priests and brothers living in these houses started to visit the families and to conduct prayers. In the evenings, Fr. Deendayal initiated prayer meetings with *bhajans*, Bible reading, preaching, and intercessory prayer as was practiced at Khristpanti *āśram*. Similar prayer meetings were conducted by other brothers living in other houses too. These meetings were attended initially by some children and later by adults as well. The gatherings were bigger and the celebrations longer during Christmas and Easter. On ordinary days, some ten to twelve people attended it. The village prayer was concluded with distributing some *prasād*. Fr. Veerendra also lived most of the time in the villages, though he had an office at the mother house in Christ Nagar. His contribution is acknowledged by Fr. Deendayal as the one who did the “spade work”.

557 Remember that the distance between the mother house and the Matridham *āśram* is less than two kilometres.

558 The mother house had, besides the administering priests, the rectors and professors of postulants, novitiate and philosophate. The IMS members only actually lived in two houses.

559 Brothers Rajesh, Ancelem, Vivekanand, Manohar and Neetibhai had stayed in these villages houses.

3.4.3. *The Evangelization Efforts of the IMS Community and the Support from the Superiors*

Evangelization, in pioneering ways, is the special charism of the IMS community⁵⁶⁰. Inculturation and missionary activity is part of the formation of the IMS training programme. The students of the IMS congregation have a “Student Missionary League” which arranges various out-reach programmes to the villages. They are compulsorily sent to the villages on all Sundays (and now Tuesdays too) to conduct prayer services. Under the banner of this league, the students conduct various programmes in the villages such as conducting prayer services, acting out Bible and social themes, giving sermons, and preaching of the Word of God. Many times, especially at Christmas and Lent, the students would go to the villages, conduct *bhajan mandlīs* (singing of *bhajans*/songs in praise of Jesus), and present the life of Jesus through dramas and puppetry. All these had contributed to an atmosphere where the IMS members were welcomed by the people or, in other words, the IMS had earned their trust and had a good rapport with the neighbouring villages.

In the beginning, still when the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement was starting to develop, it had to face many difficulties. There were criticisms from several quarters and even from the community of the IMS against this movement. Those opposed did not want to see the atmosphere of the *āśram* defiled. They held that the *āśram* was meant to be a place of silence, prayer, and meditation, while the *Khrist Bhaktas* are shouting, singing, and praising loudly and defiling the serenity of the *āśram*. Some even feared that the enemies of Christianity would be against the whole *āśram* and the Christians at large, and the priests in particular would have to face the ire of the Hindu fundamentalists. At this juncture, the support of the IMS Congregation, especially from Fr. Satyanand (who was the provincial superior of the IMS Province of Varanasi from 1992 to 1995 and then Superior General of the congregation for two consecutive terms from 1998) was of great importance. The IMS leadership headed by him supported Anil Dev and his team when the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement was in its infancy⁵⁶¹.

3.4.4. *The Evangelization Efforts of Pastor John*

The missionary effort of Pastor K.M. John of the Evangelical Church is of great significance. Anil Dev considers him to be the first and most important evangelizer of the area in the 1970s. John was a zealous missionary who hailed from

⁵⁶⁰ Cf. *The Constitutions and Statutes of the Indian Missionary Society*, 1, Varanasi, The Indian Missionary Society, 2010, p. 2. The characteristics of the IMS is given as in the directory chapter I: “Our thrust at this historic moment is toward building up of human communities based on Gospel values, the whole process of which eventually leads to the formation of Christ-centred communities”.

⁵⁶¹ Some priests thought that by allowing big gatherings, loud singing, shouting of the alleluia, and so on this would severely harm the silent atmosphere of the *āśram*. Fr. Ranveer and Fr. Devdas as the procurator and assistant in the provincial team supported the *Khrist Bhakta* movement.

Kerala, and preached in Varanasi. He was so zealous that due to his persistent preaching of the Word in most of the corners of the town and villages, he was beaten up several times, stoned, mocked, and persecuted in several ways⁵⁶². After his death, his son Ben John continued to lead his church. Though John worked hard, he did not succeed in having a large following, but he converted many people to Christianity and also semi-evangelized many people.

3.4.5. *The Charismatic Prayer Group of Cathedral Parish and the Convention of 1997*

The already-mentioned charismatic prayer services conducted at the Cathedral in collaboration with and efforts of the lay leaders added to the development and spread of this movement. In the beginning when the second Saturday night vigils were announced, only this small group came for the night vigils. The leaders of this group got themselves involved in the *Khris̥t Bhakta* Movement and became its animators and promoters. This group also kept alive the charismatic atmosphere and worked to create an awareness of charismatic prayer in the city.

The first charismatic convention of 1997, arranged as one of the preparations for Christmas, conducted at Matridham *āśram* and led by Fr. Mathew Naikanamparambil,⁵⁶³ was attended by a larger gathering of around 10,000 people. Until this convention the gathering at the *āśram* was not huge. This convention marks the beginning of the increased Sunday gathering at *āśram*. Thereafter, the Sunday crowd rose to four/five thousand. Every year new devotees join the movement in large number at this annual charismatic convention.

3.4.6. *The Preshit 2000 of Fr. Dheeraj*

Fr. Dheeraj was associated with Fr. Vinayanand in Alleppy, Kerala in training the youth of Kerala for evangelization. They decided to take the youth of Kerala to North India as lay missionaries. Guided by Fr. Dheeraj from 1990 to 1998 small groups of volunteering lay people from Kerala were brought to Varanasi and were put in one of the four houses (at Lohdan) founded by Fr. Veerender around the *āśram*. The group comprised 7 to 8 people and stayed in Varanasi for short terms; sometimes one month and sometimes four months. When Pope John Paul II called for “evangelization 2000” in preparation for the great Jubilee year of 2000, he named this group *prêshit* 2000⁵⁶⁴. The young volunteers were dedicated and, by turn, half of the group stayed at the house spending time in adoration while the other half went to the village and conducted prayer meetings⁵⁶⁵, visited

562 He was serving in the army when he miraculously escaped two accidents and then decided to live for the Gospel.

563 Fr. Naikanamparambil is known for his contribution to the Catholic Charismatic movement in India, especially in Kerala. By this time he was well known among the Catholics in India.

564 The meaning of word *prêshit* is sent.

565 They conducted the prayer services incorporating the charismatic elements.

families, and preached. Later, the group was christened as “Santvanam” and became a Pious Association with their headquarters in Delhi⁵⁶⁶.

3.4.7. The Efforts of the Diocese and Other Important Persons and Events

The efforts undertaken by the diocese of Varanasi under the ingenious leadership of its first bishop Patrick D’ Souza is noteworthy⁵⁶⁷. From the 20 diocesan priests in 1976, the total strength of the diocesan clergy grew to 119 by the year 2008. They have worked tirelessly for evangelization in this region. Besides these, there are also hundreds of religious women and men working in the diocese. Their efforts for evangelization through several ministries of education, social work, medical support etc., have made an ambience where Catholics are welcomed.

Many people have contributed to the growth of *Khrist Bhakta* Movement. Some important among them are: Sr. Sraddha who was preaching, praying, and conducting retreats for the *Khrist Bhaktas* regularly⁵⁶⁸, Sr. Bridgit who was also a staff member (of Matridham) and a powerful preacher of the Word of God, and Advocate Surendra Charan, a Protestant lay minister who used to preach in the local style and dialect. The other significant names include: Fr. Prem Antony and Fr. Rakesh who used to preach regularly at the *satsaṅgs*, (late) Fr. Vinod and Fr. Jerome who were in charge of the Benipur mission, now a parish (under which the *āśram* comes), Fr. Premraj, who was also the staff member of the *āśram* and the present parish priest of Benipur, and Br. Sanchit, who together with Fr. Anil and Sr. Lucretia took care of the *āśram* at the inception of *Khrist Bhakta* Movement⁵⁶⁹.

Anil Dev considers the visits and the prayers of many holy people as the occasions for receiving God’s blessings which helped the growth of the movement. According to him, the two (3rd to 4th February, 1996 and 5th to 7th November, 1997) visits of Fr. Mathew Naikanamparambil, the 24-hour adoration (started at the time of the annual convention from 10th to 12th November, 2000) conducted in the *āśram*, and the continuous intercession before the Blessed Sacrament in two places in the *āśram* (in *vardān* during the day and 24-hour adoration at *darśan bhavan*), also boosted the growth of the movement⁵⁷⁰.

566 Before moving out to Delhi they stayed in the city of Varanasi as a community for four years. When they made their head quarter in Delhi, they discontinued their stay in Varanasi. Today they have six communities with 28 members who are couples, spinsters, and bachelors, and one studying for priesthood.

567 He was the bishop of the diocese till 2007. The *Khrist Bhakta* movement grew substantially during the years 1995 to 2000.

568 She lived in the village and evangelized the area when the diocese wanted to start the new *āśram*.

569 Later, many IMS priests like Frs. Sachin and Devdas and many others extended their service by preaching the Word of God at the *āśram*.

570 Fr. Anil Dev considers that these intercessions and adorations are bringing blessings to the *āśram* and the movement and they in turn enhance its growth.

3.5. The Present Status of the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement

Presently, around 4000 to 5000 devotees attend the Sunday *satsaṅg* and around 4000 to 6000 attend the Saturday *satsaṅg* at Matridham. On Sundays, many devotees go to the other two *āśrams* run by the diocese while some go to the nearby parishes opened to cater to their needs. The second Saturday *satsaṅgs* at Matridham *āśram* is special for the *Khrist Bhaktas* and so they come to the *āśram* on that day. The other two *āśrams* (to be dealt with later) do not conduct any programme on the second Saturdays. The whole number of devotees of the movement is around 50,000 (in 2006 it was 30,000 and had well outnumbered the Catholic population (19,169 in 2006) of the area). It is growing day by day. Every year at the time of the annual charismatic convention, more people join the movement as devotees.

Sometimes, devotees are prohibited from publically professing their faith or going to the *āśram* due to family pressures and social disapproval. Mostly, in the initial period, many devotees are beaten up, scolded, or prohibited by their family members from going to the *āśram* or becoming devotees of Jesus⁵⁷¹. As a consequence, devotees cease to come to the *āśram*, come only occasionally, or stop coming for some time and come back after a few months or years. Likewise there are cases where some devotees stop coming because they do not find it meaningful anymore, but come back after few years when they feel the need again. Instances are also not rare where almost a whole village had become devotees. When, however, at a later stage the majority of the village deserted the movement, only a remnant remained as *Bhaktas*. Although a thorough study has not been made, it is noted that, in general, the majority of the devotees belong to all the caste/*varṇ* groups hailing from both rural and semi-urban areas.

Around the *āśram* there are a number of Protestant groups and pastors who invite these devotees to their churches, even baptising them. Some devotees choose to remain with those groups while others return to the *āśram* at some stage. We have not made a study of the devotees going to these centres.

3.6. The Role of Matridham *Āśram* in the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement

The *āśram* is considered as a holy place by the *Bhaktas*. It is, in the words of Anil Dev, the mother house and the power house of the devotees. The *āśram* stands as a symbol of holiness, unity, and the abode of Jesus, where devotees can find the *darśan* (vision) of Jesus.

571 We have heard the story of several devotees who had to suffer both physically and mentally from family members and neighbours due to their faith in Christ. Many women were beaten up several times by their husbands, some were not given food, and some were warned with dire consequences. But in all the cases we have come across, the persistence of the women even made the husbands devotees of Christ.

3.6.1. The Daily Activities of the Āśram

Life at the *āśram* begins in the early dawn with a directed meditation for the groups attending the retreats at 05.30. It is concluded by a *bhajan* at 06.15 followed by the Eucharist (at 06.30), which is more inculturated⁵⁷² to the Indian situation and which incorporates the Morning Prayer, praise, and worship.

A simple breakfast follows and everyone shares the work of cleaning the rooms and surroundings, which is called the *āśram sēva*. Some people help in the kitchen with the preparation of food. At 09.00, there is a one-hour talk for the participants of the retreats. The staff members of the *āśram* spend this time (one hour) in adoration and intercessory prayer in *vardān*. After the hour of community adoration, the staff takes turns, one by one, to spend time in adoration and intercession until 17.00. The retreatants are given a second one-hour talk at 10.30. The noon prayer meant for all the members of the *āśram* and the retreatants is conducted in the *darśan bhavan* at 11.45. Lunch is at 12.00, followed by personal prayer and at 14.00, the participants of retreats are given talks, witness, or sharing from devotees. At 16.00 coffee is served after which personal prayer is continued. The evening prayer for the groups begins at 18.30, while the evening prayer for the community is at 19.00. Supper is at 19.30 and the participants recite the Rosary at 20.30 while the staff of the *āśram* gathers for the community-meeting and prayer. On the eve of the Sunday or second Saturday, they prepare themselves spiritually during this prayer. They use this time for the “inspiration of the spirit” to give them the theme for the next day’s preaching and who will preach.

The rest of the time is left to individuals for their personal prayer. Besides all of this, the regular 24-hour adoration goes on in the *darśan bhavan* where people walk in to pray either on their way to work, shopping, the office, or on their return. The atmosphere of silence and prayer is preserved throughout day and night.

3.6.2. The Weekly Activities of the Āśram

On every Sunday, besides the morning Eucharist (which is attended by some 300 devotees) the *āśram* conducts *satsaṅgs* for the devotees. The programme begins at 10.00 with the singing of *bhajans* and talks by one or two *aguās* or some leaders⁵⁷³. From 12.00 onwards the staff of the *āśram* preaches the Word of God. While preaching, the speaker frequently uses the words and sentences from the Bible and makes the people repeat it after him. *Bhajan* and devotional hymns are also sung between the preaching. Normally, there are three preaching sessions of one hour each incorporating praise, worship, and singing. While one staff mem-

572 The 12 Points of Adaptation mentioned in an earlier chapter (1.6.3) under the heading, “The collective effort of the Church under the banner of NBCLC”, is made use of in the liturgy.

573 Mr. Banarsi, whom we have already mentioned, and who was a tailor by profession but became a doctor due to his faith in Christ, regularly preaches at this time.

ber does the preaching, the others intercede for him/her in front of the Blessed Sacrament at *vardān*. After the preaching, normally 30 minutes to one hour is set apart for giving witnesses to the miracles in one's life, when the devotees are allowed to come to the stage and share their experiences (of miracle) with the audience. This is followed by the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in which intercessory prayers, healing prayers, and the blessing of oil and water are integrated. The invocation of the Holy Spirit by singing hymns and clapping hands precedes the Benediction. At the same time, adoration and intercessory prayer goes on in two places, one in the *mandir* by some devotees and some lay leaders, the other at *vardān* by the staff of the *āśram*. The adoration in *mandir* and *vardān* is concluded at 15.00 when the Blessed Sacrament is taken out to the *satsaṅg bhavan* for the public adoration. The *satsaṅg* is concluded at 16.00 with the final blessing.

3.6.3. The Monthly Activities and Special Occasions

The *āśram* conducts three-day monthly retreats for devotees every month. The retreat is the occasion when much of catechising and teaching about Christ, Bible, family, prayer, forgiveness, and other values takes place. The retreat is conducted on the last Friday, Saturday, and Sunday of every month. It begins at 10.00 on Friday and ends at 16.00 on Sunday. For example, the meeting on the last weekend of July 2010 started with a preaching at 10.00 where the first speaker stressed the idea of man and women created as one. The second talk at 11.00 was focused on the theme of responsible husbands and wives and was followed by lunch. The third speaker at 14.00 stressed the need of forgiveness in the family. The next speaker stressed the need to be responsible parents and how to bring up children. Thereafter, there was a break for people to take a shower and so on. In the evening, the same theme was brought back for the adoration at 18.00. The adoration ended at 19.30 and supper followed. It was succeeded by the Rosary at 20.40 and then people went to bed.

The next day, most devotees attended the Eucharist at 06.30. The second day's session followed the same pattern and theme, for example, God made human beings in his image, God made them male and female, both in equal dignity, children learn more from what their parents do and how they behave rather than what they speak of or advise, etc. The day also had the mercy Rosary and witness from some devotees. On Sunday all the devotees who came for the monthly retreat attended the Eucharist before the session at 09.00 after breakfast. The second talk was at 10.00. Thereafter, they joined the large gathering of devotees in the *satsaṅg bhavan* for the usual Sunday *satsaṅg* until 16.00. During these three days people from all *varṇas* and several caste-groups come and live together, share food, pray together, sleep in the same place and display some kind of communion.

The second Saturday *satsaṅgs* conducted in the *āśram* are special for the *Khrist Bhaktas*. These are attended by a larger gathering of about 5000 to 6000

devotees⁵⁷⁴. The session starts with the singing of the *bhajan* led by Mr. Pradeep and Ms. Ashrivadam, or some of the other staff members. The itinerary of the Second Saturday is similar to the Sunday *satsaṅg* mentioned earlier but normally there are four talks (one hour each), on second Saturdays while only three on Sundays. The distribution of *prasād*⁵⁷⁵ is done only on Second Saturdays.

On the occasion of *gurupūrṇimā*,⁵⁷⁶ devotees in large numbers⁵⁷⁷ come to the *āśram* to seek the blessing of their eternal and *satguru* (true *guru*) Jesus. This is the day for the devotees to come closer to the human guru Anil Dev. On this day he allows them to come and touch his feet to receive his blessings⁵⁷⁸. This day all the people are given a *gurumantrā*⁵⁷⁹. The *gurumantrā* given in *āśram* is a sentence from the Bible printed in a small piece of paper. The *āśram* conducts special prayers and healing services on that day also. The day follows the pattern of normal Sunday *satsaṅgs*.

The *āśram* conducts three-day annual charismatic conventions usually in the month of November. This attracts people from large areas and bigger gatherings of about 10,000 to 12,000 people. This three-day convention is also a time when people in large numbers stay at the *āśram*. There are guest speakers from other charismatic centres in India to lead and guide these days. Many priests and nuns from other centres and parishes also come to attend this convention. For the devotees it is an occasion for spiritual renewal and revival. The preaching, the many miracles happening at the convention, and the witness given to those numerous miracles attract the devotees. This is also an occasion when many people come to the *āśram* for the first time, a good number of them become *Khrist Bhaktas* and join the movement after the convention.

The Christmas celebration in the *āśram* is very elaborate. The *āśram* gets crowded with around 10,000 people attending the celebrations. The celebration starts at 16.00 on the eve of Christmas, goes throughout the night and ends in the morning around 06.30. As part of the celebration, the *āśram* conducts Eucharist that lasts for around 3 hours. Devotional hymns in folk style are sung and guest preachers from outside Varanasi are invited to preach. The night vigil includes as well a two-hour Christmas play staged by a semi-professional team and a film on biblical themes.

574 Second Saturday is special for devotees and the devotees from other *āśram* areas also come to Matri-dham.

575 Usually one piece of bread is distributed as *prasād* on all second Saturdays.

576 The word meaning of *gurupūrṇimā* was already given in 3.4.2. The word *guru* is joined by two roots *gu* and *ru*. *Gu* means something which is hidden, or uncovered, and *ru* means one who gives shapes, makes clear, etc. Thus, *guru* means the one who gives form and shape to what is hidden. In brief, *guru* is the one who dispels the spiritual darkness of a disciple and helps him to form or develop the Divine within him. In other words, *gu* signifies darkness and *ru* what restrains it. Cf. *Kulārṇava Tantra*, Madras, Ganesh & Co, 1965, p. 100.

577 Around 5,000 to 7,000.

578 In the year 2010 the *gurupūrṇimā* fell on a Sunday and seeing the huge crowd Anil Dev did not allow the people to touch his feet for fear of a possible stampede.

579 Mantra is usually a word or couple of words or a syllable, considered as capable of creating spiritual transformation. Usually the name of a deity/guru or a special word or group of words is given by the guru to the disciple to be chanted.

Good Friday is celebrated in a major way by the devotees in the *āśram*. The devotees fast that day and come to the *āśram* for the Way of the Cross. People in large numbers, from several villages, carrying crosses in their hands and reciting the Way of the Cross while walking to the *āśram* is a sight to behold. Around 10,000 of them gather for the Way of the Cross. The ceremonies begin at 10.00 in the morning with preaching of the Word of God. The passion of Christ is presented as a drama at 12.00, followed by the Good Friday liturgical services. The Way of the Cross starts at 13.30 and goes around the *āśram*. People join in it with small crosses in their hands. At the end of the service at 14.30 a preaching based on the 7 words of Christ on the cross is given and at 15.30, people flock to venerate the cross. Every year the *āśram* has to make special arrangements with temporary barricades to control the *Bhaktas* to prevent any disaster such as a stampede. They also receive the *nēm caṭṇī*, i.e., bitter liquid. Strict fasting is undertaken on all Fridays of Lent and some devotees fast for a full forty days, and many others keep abstinence for 40 days. We shall give the details of their fast in our later section.

The Easter celebration follows a similar pattern of Christmas celebration. The night vigil is attended by around 10,000 devotees, several nuns and priests from the surrounding parishes and mission stations. The vigil starts in the evening at 19.00 with the candle-light procession while singing Alleluia. Besides the regular preaching, intercessory prayers, singing of hymns, etc., the night vigil has Eucharist and other Easter prayers. Occasionally, a film based on the life of Christ is shown to devotees. In the morning, the devotees carry home the blessed water and preserve it at home.

3.6.4. The Perpetual Adoration and Intercessions

The *āśram* has been conducting perpetual adoration since 2000. The adoration takes place in the *darśan bhavan*⁵⁸⁰. Anil Dev considers the adoration as one of the most foundational sources of the growth of the movement. It attracts devotees to spend time in prayer where always someone from the *āśram* offers prayers and makes intercessions. Many devotees who pass by enter the *darśan bhavan* for the *darśan* of the Blessed Sacrament. Besides this, we have seen that the staff members spend time in intercession from 09.00 to 17.00 daily in *vardān*. The devotees write their needs and place it in the box kept at the *darśan bhavan*. The staff member who sits in adoration at *vardān* takes these requests and continuously intercedes on behalf of the devotees. Later, the intercession for the same purpose is continued by those adoring at the *darśan bhavan*. Furthermore, there is one hut called *upāsānā kuṭīr* where an individual seeker can spend the whole day in silent adoration and fasting. Mostly this is occupied by the religious men and women who come for personal prayer experience.

⁵⁸⁰ On Sundays the adoration is conducted in *mandir*.

3.6.5. *The Inculturated Approach of the Āśram*

The *āśram* maintains an approach which is very much inculturated. It has only a simple one-story structure and is open to all the people. The ordinary people from the village do not feel threatened when coming to the *āśram*. People – men and women, children and the elderly, from all religions, castes, and creeds – are welcomed in the *āśram* and allowed to stay and pray. The cherished Indian values such as simplicity, God-centeredness, vegetarianism, etc., are maintained in the *āśram*. The staff living in the *āśram*, especially the priests and nuns, present themselves in traditional Indian clothes and lead a simple life-style. They speak Hindi and conduct all their prayers in Hindi. The Indian art forms and music are promoted and used. The *satsaṅgs* are open to all and the *āśram* itself is kept open all the time for any visitor/seeker to walk in and pray. The *āśram* conducts occasional interreligious programmes in which the heads of other Hindu *āśrams* and the leaders of other religions participate. Every year the annual charismatic convention begins with an interreligious prayer in which such leaders share the stage and address the devotees⁵⁸¹. One may conclude that the *āśram* gives out a message of openness towards other religions.

3.6.6. *The Availability of Counselling and Guidance*

A staff member is always available for those devotees who come to the *āśram* with their problems. They are given necessary counselling and guidance. Staff members listen to the devotees and pray for them as well. Ms. Ashirvadam, Sr. Vincy and Fr. Vineet are responsible for meeting the devotees at any time. Mostly Ashirvadam meets the devotees. Sr. Vincy who is trained in counselling also meets the people who are in need of more thorough counselling. Fr. Vineet also meets devotees who come in search of consolation and prayer. Thus, the devotees who come with a heavy heart find a person who is willing to listen to them, console them, pray for them and, if necessary, give counselling to them.

3.6.7. *The Use of Print and Electronic Media*

Although the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement is primarily spread by word of mouth, it is sustained by the use of print and electronic media. The *āśram* publishes books⁵⁸² and booklets, produces devotional hymns, music, video cassettes, CDs, a magazine (named *Prabhu ne Kaha*, formerly entitled *Vachan Sudha*) and makes available to the devotees the Holy Bible and a variety of other pious articles such as rosary, cross, etc. The talks given by Anil Dev are also recorded on cassettes and made available for the people.

581 The term used for the Sunday and Second Saturday prayer meeting is *satsaṅg*. And the word *satsaṅg* has an interreligious connotation.

582 The books published by the *āśram* are *Sahārā*, *Kān lagākar śunō*, *He prabhu bōl*, *Viṣwasi bano* and *Va-canāvali*.

We had earlier noted that in August 2007 the *āśram* started to air a half an hour programme on the cable channel from Ranchi, Bihar. The channel, called *Zee Jagaran*, telecasts the programme entitled, *Nutan dhara*, which consists of biblical talks, plays on biblical and moral themes, and songs.

All these things add to the faith formation of devotees and to the evangelization of future devotees. The overall prayerful atmosphere of the *āśram*, the 24-hour perpetual adoration, the several priests and nuns who come to the *āśram* for retreat and renewal, the simplicity and openness of the *āśram*, the availability of the *āśram* staff, etc., contribute to the enhancement of peoples' devotion and reverence.

3.7. The Structure of the Movement

3.7.1. The *Āśram* and the Staff

The Matridham *āśram* is the centre of the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement. This *āśram* functions more like a family and has kept an atmosphere of freedom and openness. Anil Dev wants to continue to keep its simplicity and non-institutional nature where all the members can continue to live as a family.

Anil Dev is the guru of the *āśram* where he is assisted by three priests, Vineet, James and Ranjit, two nuns, Lucretia and Vincentia of the SRA⁵⁸³ congregation, and several lay volunteers/leaders⁵⁸⁴. We shall deal with the role of Anil Dev in a separate section. Fr. Vineet and Fr. James belong to the diocese of Varanasi while Fr. Ranjit is a member of the IMS congregation.

Fr. Vineet has lived in the *āśram* since 2008. Before moving into the *āśram*, he had worked as an assistant parish priest in Birabhanti, in the civil district of Ballia. He wanted to work among the Hindus. He frequented the villages and conducted prayer services in Catholic houses. Slowly, Hindus were attracted and joined the prayer. Gradually, he conducted prayers in their houses too. Around 200 people started to attend his Sunday Eucharist celebrated with long sermons, singing of *bhajans*, etc. He wanted to spend more time in prayer; hence, he joined the *āśram*. Now he is responsible for the publishing of the bi-monthly magazine called *Prabhu ne Kaha*⁵⁸⁵. It has a circulation of 4200 copies, of which around 3000 are sent by post. He is also in charge of the retreats conducted in the *āśram*. Besides preaching the Word of God in the Sunday *satsaṅg*, he gives classes, conducts outreach programmes, and visits the villages when needed. He is responsible for meeting the *Khrist Bhaktas* who come to the *āśram*

583 The Missionary Sisters of the Queen of the Apostles (*Societas Missionalis Sororum Reginae Apostolorum*).

584 The list of members and their details are from the time when the research was conducted between July-October 2010.

585 It has 24 pages and contains articles on faith, love, hope, forgiveness and other biblical virtues and values, and witnesses of the people about cures and miracles.

for blessings, prayers, and other needs. Fr. Vineet fills in for Anil Dev in his absence.

Fr. James stayed in the *āśram* for almost one year in 2002. In 2010 he returned to the *āśram* as a staff member. Besides his responsibility in the diocese as the director of the biblical centre, he shares the responsibility of the preaching the Word in the retreats and all other programmes. He regularly preaches the Word of God to the *Khrist Bhaktas* in the *satsaṅgs* and conducts the adoration, etc., for them.

Fr. Ranjit was appointed in July 2009 to assist the guru in all matters in the *āśram*. Since there was no administrator in the *āśram* he has taken on the responsibility and looks after the daily running of the *āśram*. He also gives classes and preaches the Word on Sundays. All three priests go out very often to other places to give retreats.

Sr. Lucretia has been serving the *āśram* from the very beginning of the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement. She helps the *āśram* and the movement in several ways. She conducts the prayers and guides those who come to the *āśram*. She teaches *yog(ā)* to those who come for retreats. She is almost like a mother in the *āśram* and her service is seen in almost all areas, wherever any needs arise.

Sr. Vincentia moved to the *āśram* in 2009 and gives counselling to those who are in need. In the *āśram* she is in charge of the office. Sometimes she joins Anil Dev in out-reach programmes. She also gives classes to those who come for retreats. She is the contact person in the *āśram* and arranges the programme schedule. Sr. Deepti and Sr. Vandana⁵⁸⁶ are in charge of *Asrey*, the care-centre for mentally challenged people, which is the offshoot of the *āśram*.

Mrs. Ashirvadam is a staff member who spends time in counselling. She belongs to the core team members in the *āśram*. She meets devotees who come to the *āśram* with all kinds of difficulties. Normally she meets them after 11.00 in the morning. She also shares the intercessory prayers and singing at the *satsaṅgs*. Mr. Girija is the head-catechist at Benipur parish⁵⁸⁷ (under which the *āśram* is located) and lives in the *āśram*. He conducts the prayer and adoration for two hours in the morning and leaves for the villages after lunch at 12.00. In the villages he conducts prayers and meets the people. In the *āśram* he directs most of the patients about what has to be done. When he thinks that the sickness is severe, he advises them to remain in the *āśram* for two or three days and join the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and to spend time in prayer. On Sundays and second Saturdays, he acts as a supervisor who oversees everything. He is the contact person for *Khrist Bhaktas* and *aguās* from the village. He also monitors all the gatherings and takes care of the discipline.

There are also some short term members who stay either for some months or one year. Sr. Cerena and Sr. Shanti have come for such temporary stays. Sr.

586 They belong to the Franciscan Clarist Congregation (FCC). Sr. Deepti was on transfer at the time of our participation and a new nun was expected shortly.

587 This parish is entrusted to care of IMS priests.

Cerena is in the *āśrams* for three months and conducts the morning meditation for the retreatants. Sr. Shanti joined in August 2010. She is a trained counsellor, and is now assessing what way she could serve the *āśram*. Ms. Nirmala shares the responsibility of the *āśrams* mainly related to the welfare of the temple, the *darśan bhavan*, *dhyān bhavan*, etc. She conducts the intercessory prayer and adoration for many hours both during the day and the night. All those mentioned above regularly spend time in adoration and intercession before the Blessed Sacrament according to a fixed time schedule.

Beside the main catechist Girija, Raju is also another catechist in Benipur parish, but living in the Matridham. He has an additional duty as the driver of the auto rickshaw owned by the *āśram*. Shyam Sunder looks after the store and the sale of pious articles. There are two couples helping in the welfare of the *āśram*. Benjamin and his wife Carmela help in the cleaning and arrangement of the buildings in the *āśram* and its premises. Ajay and Susan serve in the kitchen while two youths, Anthony and Manoj, work in the vegetable garden. Mr. Xavier and Ramchandra serve the *āśram* as gatekeepers.

There are others who do not live in the *āśram* but come to the *āśram* regularly to do their bit for the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement. Mr. Jacob regularly helps in *satsaṅgs* by singing, conducting adorations or praise and worship. He also gives witness on monthly retreats and other occasional retreats. Mr. Raphael is a benefactor who comes to give witness and to join the second Sunday preaching on the Bible. Ms. Meena Kumari and Chandan spend much time regularly in the *āśram* conducting the intercession, praise, and worship. Mr. Pradeep comes to sing on second Saturdays and owns a studio where the *Nutan dara* of *āśram* is recorded.

3.7.2. The Village Community, *Aguās* and *Sēva Dal*

In the villages, the *Bhaktas* gather around a leader called *aguā* (guide) for the prayer. The *aguās* are from the village community and as a result of their charisma, the *āśram* community recognizes them as *aguās*. It is the duty of the *aguās* to animate the small groups in the villages and lead them in prayer. These *aguās* are those who have already felt the touch of Jesus and in turn become the messengers. The *aguās* are not paid but they serve the movement in response to the favours they are convinced to have received from God. The *āśram* conducts three-day retreats for them once in two months to help them to animate the village communities. Some women who are not *aguās* also conduct the prayer services in the villages.

There are also some members of *sēva dal* (service team) who have the duty of serving the community especially on the big gatherings and at Sunday *satsaṅgs*. They take care of the distribution of the *prasād* on second Saturdays and together with the *aguās* take care of the discipline. However, they do not guide the prayer in the villages. *Aguās* and *sēva dal* together are 70 in number. Some of the

aguās join the *āśram* staff on their out-reach programmes for giving witness, singing, and conducting praise and worship, etc.⁵⁸⁸.

3.7.3. The Role of Anil Dev in the Movement

Anil Dev was born in Kerala, India on January 7, 1957. At the age of 15, he joined the IMS congregation and was ordained a priest in March 1986. Immediately after his ordination, he was appointed as the rector of the minor seminarians of the congregation. Three years later, he was appointed as the director of the IMS communication centre following which he took up the role of the guru of the Matridham *āśram*.

The role played by *Svāmī* Anil Dev in the inception, growth, and development of the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement is immense. He successfully accomplished the twin tasks of a guru of the *āśram* and charismatic leader of a mass movement.

We have already seen that the growth the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement effectively began when Anil Dev took charge of the *āśram* as the guru. Before becoming the guru, although he was associated with the *āśram*, his interest was more in working with the youth. At the same time he lived in the *āśram* campus as the director of the IMS communication centre and went around the villages showing the 16 mm film on the life of Jesus called *Dayasagar*, preaching in the villages, conducting *bhajan maṇḍlī* (continuous singing of devotional songs), writing slogans on walls such as, let us go *āśram*, etc.

He transformed the *āśram*, which was considered a place for isolation, silence, meditation, etc., into a place not only for silence and meditation but also for the people to come and listen to the Word of God, participate in the singing of praise and worship and even shouting of alleluia. To make it more explicit, let us use the Indian terminology and say that the *āśram*, which was considered as a centre for *jñānamārgīs*⁵⁸⁹, was transformed into a centre for *bhaktimārgīs*⁵⁹⁰ too. Moreover, the *āśram*, which was considered as limited to the higher *varṇas*, was now opened for the ordinary folks.

As the head of the *āśram* he has combined in himself the role of the guru of the *āśram*, where the seekers look for a learned guru, and as the leader of the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement, where the ordinary folks look for a charismatic leader. In our discussions with him he mentioned that he did not come to the *āśram* as his personal choice, but was forced into it⁵⁹¹. What we now observe is that after he joined the *āśram* as the guru, he fashioned himself well to the demands of both of the ministries⁵⁹².

588 Meena and Urmila are powerful speakers and witnesses.

589 People following the means of knowledge (*jñān*) as a means of God-realization.

590 People following *bhakti* (devotion) as a means of God-realization. There were many IMS members who opposed his move to open the *āśram* for the people stating that the silent atmosphere of the *āśram* will be disturbed and that it would not remain an *āśram* anymore.

591 He meant that since the congregation could not find a proper person for *āśram* life, he was asked to become the guru.

592 He also became a vegetarian and lives a simple life suited for the *āśram*.

We have already noted that the most important event in the emergence of the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement was the charismatic convention conducted at the Cathedral in 1993⁵⁹³. This convention was lead by Anil Dev. Although the night vigils in the *āśram* were not lead by him from 1993 to 1995, he was associated with it and often guided it. We have noted that after he became the guru of the *āśram*, the number of devotees grew, that the prayer meetings could not be held in the chapel, and temporary sheds had to be built and enlarged repeatedly to accommodate the growing number of devotees.

We have also noted the importance of the charismatic method of prayer in the development and sustenance of the movement. Anil Dev was one of the pioneers in popularising the charismatic methods of prayers in the Catholic Church in Varanasi and in North India. The rural poor came to the *āśram* initially to get cured of their physical diseases, seeking freedom from the powers of evil spirits and release from their tensions, anxieties, etc. They found this in the *satsaṅgs*, especially in the healing prayers lead by Anil Dev. The miraculous cures and the experience of freedom from the powers of evil, tensions, and anxieties became the bottom line for people to become devotees of Christ and a stimulus for bringing in more people to the *āśram* who also were experiencing similar difficulties.

Anil Dev is a powerful speaker able to use effectively the charismatic methods of preaching the Word of God. He is capable of keeping his listeners spell-bound for hours with his preaching capacity. His experience in working as the director of communication centre of the IMS helped him to communicate effectively. Moreover, he is well versed in Hindi, the North Indian *lingua franca*, and is able to interact with the rural population in *bhojpuri*, their local dialect. He is a musician blessed with a melodious voice. Keeping the needs of the people in mind he himself composes many songs and gives melody to them; such hymns are very popular among the devotees.

He has succeeded in establishing a good rapport with the leaders of other religious communities. He arranges interreligious programmes in the *āśram* with the co-operation of the leaders. He also attends programmes arranged by the other religious communities in the city of Varanasi.

Anil Dev understood that in the context of North India, changing the religion of the people by giving baptism and making them Christians would immediately attract the wrath of the Hindu fundamentalists, which in turn would result in the closure of the *āśram* and the end of the movement. Therefore, he was able to strike a balance and chose to limit his role to the preaching the Word of God. Maintaining the status of the people as devotees of Christ and not calling them Christians is one of the most important points of success in the growth of the movement.

There were instances when the fundamentalists came to threaten him and his endeavour, but he told them to attend all his preaching and to enquire if he were preaching the conversion from one religion to another. He also could argue his

593 See 2.4.1 & 2.

case well showing that no conversion was being carried out by him. On the other hand, he had to face the challenge from the inside. There were many priests who wanted to baptize the devotees as they saw this as the opportunity to make them Christians. To those people he said that he was the guru of an *āśram* and not a parish priest and that the *āśram* is a place of prayer.

Although he preaches Christ as the Guru and master, his appearance and behaviour as the human guru attracts people. He has lived up to the expectation of people of how and what a guru should be like. The new devotees address him as *svāmīji* (Lord, the normal way the Hindu religious heads or gurus are addressed) and later as *pitaji* (Father) hearing the way many other devotees call him⁵⁹⁴. They find in him a god-man and he has moulded and conducted himself to that expectation. One could see him praying for long hours, regular in his spiritual exercises, living a simple life, content with his vegetarian diet, etc. He has deep faith in the providence of God and feels the showering of the Holy Spirit on him for this “ministry of the Word”.

He guides the other priests, nuns, and *aguās* and teaches them how to guide a *satsaṅg*, charismatic prayer, healing prayer, etc. The staff members of the *āśram* look up to him for guidance and leadership. They feel that he is a father to all those who are involved in the *āśram*. Those who have in one way or other associated with the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement consider him as the founder of the movement.

At the moment new devotees come looking for him and gradually he teaches them that Christ is the real Guru. Presently he is the backbone and chief inspirer of the movement. According to the opinions of ordinary devotees and some of the *aguās*, the movement itself would come to an end if he leaves the *āśram* at this time.

The Bishop, the leaders and members of the IMS community, the priests of the diocese, and the priests and nuns working with him acknowledge the commitment Anil Dev has shown towards nurturing this movement. All of them consider him to be the man behind its success. They think that he has not kept himself at the centre of the movement but he has fostered the movement in such a way that an equally committed person could fill in the vacuum if he is moved from the *āśram*.

Anil Dev in his personal diaries has mentioned that he felt the pouring of the Spirit on him and that he feels the presence of Jesus with him. Although he had to face difficulties and problems he always felt that the Spirit of the Lord is with him and guiding him⁵⁹⁵. Looking back he feels that it is the work of the Spirit and that he has been made use of as an instrument.

594 Interestingly the few who are baptised and became Christians address him using the English word father with a suffix “ji” as *fatherji*, which is the normal way of addressing any Catholic priest.

595 He had shared with the present researcher about some of the problems he had to face in the initial days.

3.8. The *Khrist Bhakta* Movement and the Diocese of Varanasi

In the year 1995 there were meetings of the priests involved in the movement to reflect on its future course. As a result of their deliberation Anil Dev met Patrick D'Souza the then Bishop of Varanasi Diocese, and proposed that the pastoral needs of the *Bhaktas* of the Northern region should be entrusted to someone else, since many *Bhaktas* came from that area and it was too far for people to come to the Matridham *āśram*.

3.8.1. *Yesu Dham Āśram, Chuaharpur*

In 1995, Fr. Amalraj was entrusted with the task of opening an *āśram* in the northern region. In order to realize the mission the SRA sisters also joined him in 1996. Fr. Amalraj lived in a rented home in a village near Chaubepur and baptised some families. The SRA sisters led by Sr. Sraddha lived in the village and visited the people and conducted prayer services.

Eventually, many people started to attend the prayer services and some miracles and cures happened during the prayer services. The miraculous cure of a deaf and dumb girl was an important event and it brought joy to the village and many people became *Khrist Bhaktas*. At the same time, they had also to face some opposition from the Hindu fundamentalists. Instigated by the fundamentalists, police came in search of Sr. Sraddha, but after meeting the people of the village, seeing the work done by Sr. Sraddha and her team, and the faith of the people, the police allowed Sr. Sraddha to continue her mission.

The diocese purchased a plot of land at Chuaharpur⁵⁹⁶ (towards the north eastern side of Matridham) in 1998 and opened an *āśram* and christened it Yesu Dham (which means abode of Jesus). In the same year Fr. Ishwaranand took charge as guru of Yesu Dham. Some of the *aguās* who were trained by the Matridham *āśram* also joined the Yesu Dham. Fr. James Selvaraj who was a deacon at that time joined the team⁵⁹⁷. Under the guidance of Fr. Ishwaranand the construction of the priests' house and the convent were completed and blessed on December, 20, 1999. A small church in the shape of a temple was built and blessed on March, 6, 2000. A cemetery also has been constructed and the *āśram* is now functioning as a parish as well as an *āśram*. Later, Fr. Thomas Beck was appointed as the parish priest in 2003 and Fr. Aloysius took over in 2010.

Presently, the nuns and the three catechists come together in the *āśram* church for prayer in the morning at 9.30. Thereafter they visit the villages and conduct prayer services. On the second day of every month *satsaṅgs* are held in the *āśram* led mostly by the catechist and the nuns, however, the present parish priest joins the *satsaṅgs* and guides the service. The *satsaṅg* begins at 10.00 with

⁵⁹⁶ This is around 20 km from the Matridham *āśram* also around 20 km away from the city of Varanasi.

⁵⁹⁷ Together with the *aguās*, he visited the villages and started the prayer meetings and also conducted some survey of the villages.

ārāṭī,⁵⁹⁸ and *bhajans* followed by intercessions preaching the Word of God, singing, praise and worship, healing prayers and penitential service. It is concluded at 15.30. It is attended by three to four hundred *Khrīst Bhaktas* while the Catholics keep themselves away. Sometimes people bring vegetables, rice and other edible items as offerings. Every Sunday the Eucharist and preaching is held simultaneously for the *Khrīst Bhaktas* and the Catholics. Around 200 people attend the celebration.

3.8.2. *Shanti Dham Āśram, Harahua*

Another *āśram* was opened by the diocese to cater to the needs of the *Khrīst Bhaktas* towards the western side of Matridham *āśram*. Before starting this *āśram*, Fr. Iswaranad, Fr. James and two FCC sisters stayed for one year in Matridham *āśram* to gain more experience of the *Khrīst Bhakta* Movement. They wanted a plot of land accessible to the people and filled with sufficient trees which they found after a long search in the year 2004 at Harahua⁵⁹⁹. On July, 1, 2004, the foundation stone for the *āśram* was laid. On 14 September Fr. Iswaranand, Fr. James and three FCC sisters moved into the *āśram* in a temporary building. On 23 September 2004, the *āśram* was inaugurated and named Shanti Dham (which means abode of peace). Soon they started the prayer meetings in the small hut and under the trees. Initially only a few people came but slowly more people came to the *āśram*.

At present, Fr. Iswaranand is the guru and parish priest of the centre. On 26 June 2010 Fr. Sonelal joined as a team member and on June 28, 2010, Fr. Francis Yagappan as assistant guru of the *āśram*⁶⁰⁰. Four FCC sisters, Anny, Lissy Maria, Jolly and Alice, also serve the *āśram*. The *āśram* has 11 *aguās*, 5 men and 6 women. They come to the *āśram* on every Wednesday for the Eucharist and continue to spend one hour in prayer. The *āśram* conducts 24-hour adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. All the staff members take turns for this 24-hour adoration, normally with the four nuns sharing the major bulk of it.

On Sundays, the Eucharist starts at 06.30 which is conducted in a similar way as in Matridham. Around ten to fifteen *Khrīst Bhaktas* attend the Eucharist. The preaching of the Word or the *satsaṅg* begins at 13.00. There are two talks of almost one hour each, usually one by a nun and the other by a priest. It is followed by giving witness, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and the healing prayer, which is concluded at 16.00. Around 70 to 100 devotees attend the *satsaṅg*.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ārāṭī* is the waving of light/incense in front of the deity.

⁵⁹⁹ The place is around 10 km from Matridham *āśram* through the main road. But using a short cut through pocket roads the distance is only 6-7 km.

⁶⁰⁰ Fr. Iswaranand retires in 2011 and Fr. Yagappan will take charge as guru.

This *āśram* conducts special monthly *satsaṅg* on first Fridays. The pattern is similar to what is followed in the Matridham *āśram* on second Saturdays. The *satsaṅg* includes singing of *bhajans*, praise and worship, intercessory prayers, preaching of the word, healing prayer, and adoration. Preaching is by the priests and nuns, the *aguās* lead the prayer session while the healing service is led by the guru. On first Fridays, *prasād* (bann) is distributed. The first Friday *satsaṅg* is attended by around 200 devotees.

3.8.3. Parishes for Catering to the *Khrīst Bhaktas*

The diocese has opened some parishes⁶⁰¹ in the vicinity of Varanasi city though not exclusively started for catering to *Khrīst Bhaktas*, but with an intention of serving the Catholics as well as the *Khrīst Bhaktas*. In these parishes the number of *Khrīst Bhaktas* is greater than that of the Catholics.

3.8.3.1. Fatima Matha Church, Mawaiya

The parish church at Mawaiya, which is part of the city of Varanasi, has 20 Catholic families and around 250 *Khrīst Bhaktas*⁶⁰². The church was named as Fatima Matha Church and erected as a parish on August 15, 2005 with Fr. Manuel D'Cunha appointed as the parish priest. The parish conducts longer Sunday Eucharist with several *bhajans* and a longer sermon etc. At the time of offertory, people (devotees) bring flowers, fruits, rice, etc., in procession. Water and oil for blessing is kept around the altar and is blessed at the end of the mass. Communion is given to the Catholics while *prasād* is distributed to the *Khrīst Bhaktas*.

This parish has set apart the last day of every month for prayer to cater to the needs of *Khrīst Bhaktas*. The *satsaṅg* on that day is led by the priests and nuns of Yesu Dham *āśram*, Chuaharpur. As part of the devotional practice, the Catholics and *Khrīst Bhaktas* take the statue of Mary home and then keep the statue at home for one full day. This devotion begins in the month of September and continues for one month. If there are more people who want to take the statue home, it is continued into the following months too. Mostly it is the *Khrīst Bhaktas* who take the statue home, whereas the Catholics seem not interested in this devotion⁶⁰³.

601 Towards the end of his term as bishop, Patrick D'Souza opened many parishes to cater to the *Khrīst Bhaktas*.

602 The directory of the diocese of Varanasi says that it has 181 Catholics. It includes the nuns and candidates of the religious institutes.

603 This practice of taking the statue home is seen only in this parish.

3.8.3.2. Cathedral Parish, Varanasi

St. Mary's Cathedral parish also caters to the *Khrist Bhaktas*. The Cathedral has no special service for the devotees on Sundays but it has devoted Fridays to their needs. On every Friday from 15.30 to 17.30 a charismatic prayer meeting is conducted in the Cathedral. Around 20 to 25 devotees, mostly women, attend the session regularly and sometimes 10 to 15 Christians, also mostly women come to attend the prayer. A small group of 10 to 15 *Khrist Bhaktas* comes for the Sunday Eucharist. They also observe Lent, fasting, and other pious activities as Christians do. It is also noted that even some Muslims come to the prayer meetings in the cathedral. The prayer meeting is lead by either the parish priest/assistant priest or one of the nuns from the nearby SRA convent. The nuns from the surrounding convents and their novices regularly participate in the prayer. They regularly visit the families of the devotees. Some people present the *dupatta* (scarf) to the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary⁶⁰⁴ and some devotees bring fruit, grain, and flowers to the church as offerings.

3.8.3.3. St. Thomas Parish, Benipur

The Matridham *āśram* comes under the Benipur Parish. This parish was established in 1988. Originally this was one of the four houses built by Fr. Virendra IMS around their Christ Nagar Mother house. This parish is entrusted to the IMS community and the diocese normally appoints an IMS priest as the parish priest.

At present Fr. Premraj is the parish priest. He moved from the Matridham *āśram* to this parish in 2005. There are around 100 Catholics in the parish⁶⁰⁵, and around 50 catechumens. The parish has the credit of having the maximum number of *Khrist Bhaktas* thanks to the presence of the Matridham *āśram*. The parish priest visits the villages regularly. There are two full time catechists paid by the diocese who are guiding the village meetings where *Khrist Bhaktas* gather for the prayer. These catechists are also counted among the *aguās* of the *āśram*⁶⁰⁶. In collaboration with the Matridham *āśram*, this parish's main work is the welfare of the *Khrist Bhaktas*.

The Sunday Eucharist in the parish is conducted with integrating many elements from the 12 Points of Adaptation as practiced in the *āśram*⁶⁰⁷. It is attended by a gathering of around 200 people from the surrounding villages. Preceding the mass, the devotees gather for singing of *bhajans* and saying the rosary. It is

604 Some Catholics also do have this practice. E.g. the Marian shrine at Velankanni gets lots of *sārīs*.

605 The diocesan directory says that there are 215 Catholics. See the directory of the Varanasi diocese, *Directory 2008*, Bishop's House, Varanasi, 2008, p. 65. The Parish priest points out that when the number of priests, nuns and candidates are included the number comes around 200.

606 The parish had appointed some 12 *aguās* as *prêrits* (apostles) for five years, and were paid by a project. With the completion of the project the system of *prêrits* is done away with.

607 The same 12 Points of Adaption mentioned in the previous chapter.

led by the head catechists of the *āśram* and the catechists of the parish⁶⁰⁸. People bring oil and water for blessing and it is placed around the altar. The Eucharist follows for which both the Catholics and the *Khrist Bhaktas* sit together for the celebration⁶⁰⁹. At the time of offertory, people bring fruit, flowers, rice and other food grain to the altar in procession. The celebration also includes praise, worship, intercessory prayers, and singing of hymns. At the time of communion, the Eucharist is distributed to Catholics while the *Khrist Bhaktas* are given *prasād*. After the communion, the priest blesses the oil and water, which is followed by the prayer for healing⁶¹⁰. The whole celebration is completed in two hours.

3.8.3.4. Other Parishes within the City of Varanasi

Besides the parish at Mawaiya, the diocese opened some more parishes with a view to catering to the needs of *Khrist Bhaktas*. These parishes are at Lohata, Marhauuli and Nagwa, all within the city area of Varanasi. The St. Joseph's Church in Lohata was erected as a parish in 2005 to cater to the *Khrist Bhaktas* in that area. This parish has 150 Catholics including the nuns, priests and their candidates, novices, and the floating Catholics who come here in search of a job⁶¹¹. St. John the Baptist Church at Marhauuli was established on March 28, 2007. The number of Catholics including the religious and seminarians is 127. St. Francis of Assisi Church, Nagwa was erected as a parish in 2001 and Fr. John Abraham was appointed as the parish priest. Many formation houses and religious institutions come under this parish which lies within the city area of Varanasi and was separated from the Cathedral parish⁶¹².

Christ the King parish at Mugalsarai, which lies close to the city of Varanasi was established early in 1936 in view of catering to the Catholics working in the railways. This church is now known as the Shrine of the Infant Jesus and many devotees of Christ hail from this area. The church also started Friday prayer meetings for the *Khrist Bhaktas*. Now, Sr. Bridget, who formerly lived at the Matridham *āśram*, guides the Friday prayer meetings and a good number of *Khrist Bhaktas* join the meetings.

3.8.3.5. Other Support/Efforts from the Diocese

The diocese is supporting the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement in various ways. Almost all the parishes have some *Khrist Bhaktas* who join the celebrations in various degrees. Some of the parishes, such as Mariabad and Ghazipur, have a signifi-

608 Mr. Girija from the *āśram* comes to the parish on all Sundays for the mass.

609 The Catholics are those who were earlier devotees and baptised in the recent times.

610 This parish priest has lot more relation with the devotees of Christ than the other parishes since Matridham is in this parish.

611 Cf. *Directory 2008*, p. 58.

612 *Ibid.* pp. 51-54.

cant number of *Khrist Bhaktas*⁶¹³. All the theology students of the diocese are sent to Matridham *āśram* for one month's experience and to see how the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement is functioning. The diocese has spared two of their priests, Fr. James and Fr. Vineet, for the *āśram/Khrist Bhakta* ministry. Fr. Vineet has been living in the Matridham *āśram* as staff member for three years, while Fr. James stayed in the *āśram* for almost one year in 2002 and has now come back to the *āśram* as a staff member in 2010. Besides the existing two *āśrams* run by the diocese, a proper *āśram* in its full sense (i.e., not converted into a parish) to cater to the *Khrist Bhaktas* will be opened soon. Fr. Vineet is set apart for this ministry, and the diocese is now looking for a suitable area for the proposed *āśram*.

Raphy Manjaly, who was appointed bishop in 2007, takes a keen interest in the welfare of the *Khrist Bhaktas*. Often he visits the three *āśrams* and encourages those involved in the ministry. He considers the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement as God's special blessing to the diocese of Varanasi. He advises the members that the diocese is duty bound to promote it and keep it active and alive⁶¹⁴. He convened on 24 February 2009 at Shanti Dham *āśram* a meeting of all those who are interested in the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement. The meeting was intended to reflect on the various possibilities of effectively carrying out the ministry to *Khrist Bhaktas* and to get more and more ministers to commit themselves to this cause⁶¹⁵.

The desire for taking the movement forward is reflected in the report of the missionary meeting of the diocese of Varanasi held in July 2010. It advocates every parish and mission station of the diocese to set apart one day every month exclusively for preaching the Word of God, praise, worship, and prayer for healing, with a view to attracting *Khrist Bhaktas*⁶¹⁶. The meeting also felt the need to formulate clear common policy concerning their baptism, looking into legal matters, the need to take care of training, etc. It felt as well the need for all the parishes to create an atmosphere similar to an *āśram*.

3.9. The Future of the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement: The Vision of the Leaders

The *Khrist Bhakta* Movement is in its infancy. The growth and the direction of this movement depend significantly on the attitude and the policy of the leaders who are involved with it. What is the destiny of the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement according to the understanding and vision of the leaders? In this section, we shall consider the views of the leaders about the movement and its future course.

613 On 9th June 2010 when we visited the parish, around 100 devotees attended the prayer meeting.

614 Cf. The report of the meeting of those engaged in *Khrist Bhakta* Movement in Varanasi, 2009, p. 1.

615 Cf. *Ibid.*

616 Cf. The report of the Group Discussion on the occasion of missionary meeting held at Navsadhana, Varanasi, July 2010.

3.9.1. The Vision of Anil Dev and the Āśram Staff

Anil Dev believes that the movement is God's special gift and is the result and sign of His blessings. Wherever he goes, he invites priests, religious, and lay leaders to join the movement and to be open to the calling of the Spirit. He believes that the movement will grow bigger and bigger. He thinks of this movement as a spirit-based and a laity-based movement. He is happy that it is self-supportive and not dependent on foreign support.

He wants the *Khris̥t Bhaktas* to grow and be on their own. He says that he avoids being at the centre and does not want them to stop with him. Therefore, rarely he gives them access to him. The devotees want to receive his blessings by touching his feet or want him to keep his hand on their head and pray. But he leaves such works to other staff members and leaves the crowd, preferring to stay in solitude. When people come to him for prayer, he gives them the example of a patient and the doctor saying that if one is sick, one has to go to the doctor; here Jesus is the doctor who will cure them and not the guru or staff of the *āśram*.

He does not want the devotees to throw away their spirituality and thus "de-culturate" them. He says what we give to them is the Word of God and we do not interfere in their cultural practices, but they are left free to live the Word in their cultural context. The Word accepted into the culture definitely challenges them and the positive results are seen. He insists on the importance of maintaining the *āśram* context for the devotees. This context for him is essential in sustaining the "Indianness" of the movement. The inculturated atmosphere of the *āśram* and its members play a crucial role in attracting and sustaining the movement. He considers the *āśram* as a place for both *bhaktimārgīs* (those who accept devotion as means of spiritual realization) and *jñānamārgīs* (those who accept knowledge as means of spiritual realization). He thinks that no one can come to *jñān* without *bhakti*, and that both of them go together.

At the same time he is concerned about the future of the *Khris̥t Bhaktas*, although he expresses his trust in the guidance of the Spirit. He is not bothered about those who leave the movement. He is of the opinion that only those who are at the periphery will desert the movement but those who have come to the centre of faith and experienced Christ will never leave. He is happy about those few who have gone deeper into the spiritual life.

Concerning the question of admitting the *Khris̥t Bhaktas* to the Church through baptism, he seems to be of two minds. On the one hand, he is against making the *Bhaktas* part of the already established system; on the other hand, he wants to see the deeply committed and especially those whom he considers as mystics⁶¹⁷, becoming part of the Christian communion. His ambivalence is noticeable in the fact that he often speaks publically about his role in the movement as giving the Word of God and not baptizing. At the same time, he allows

617 In our personal interaction with such devotees we also noticed the deep spirituality they live and their effort to live the message of Christ sincerely.

some of those who are really interested in and insistent on becoming members of the Church to be baptised in the parish. In such cases, he wants the baptised to remain as closely as possible to the *āśram* and to continue to remain integrated with the devotees, and not to be integrated in the parish community.

He is looking for a suitable ecclesiological model where the devotees will not be forced to leave their cultural world and, at the same time, they will be considered as members of the Church. He is not happy with the ecclesiological model that is present and practiced. Therefore, he is in search for something new. He pledges his commitment to the Church and does not want to have any confrontation with the authorities of the Church, but is not satisfied with making them members of the present church model. Moreover, he sympathizes with those devotees who are from the higher castes/*varṇas*. He points out that no one understands the pain of the high castes. Those high caste people who have come closer to Christ seem to be in a dilemma. Becoming Christian is considered by the people in general as betraying one's family, culture, and nation. Christianity is also seen as a religion of the *dalits*. *Dalits* are looked down upon with disgust and abomination. Those high caste members who want to enter more deeply into communion with Jesus and to receive the Eucharist are not able to break away from their family and the village community⁶¹⁸. In India, especially in the villages, society is not individualistic, but communitarian; hence, leaving one's family and village is similar to ceasing to be alive. Such a change of one member or family creates problems for their relatives too⁶¹⁹.

He is aware of the struggle many of the *Bhaktas* have undergone because of their faith in Christ. They were beaten up and insulted even by their family members⁶²⁰. He says that the *Bhaktas* have suffered enough for Christ. They are willing to suffer more for Christ. He asks, "Should they suffer now for Church? Is Church and Christ identical? How far are they identical? Why should we make them members of the Church?"

The staff members of the *āśram* have their own perception about the future of the movement. From our discussions with the *āśram* staff, especially our interaction with the priest staff members the following things have come to the fore.

Svāmī Vineet perceives the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement as a unique way of being church. He came to the movement after he received a vision in which he was told to be with God and to work for the nations. The Spirit, he says, is active if we are open to its promptings. He perceives the *Khrist Bhaktas* as communities centred on Christ. He says that faith in Christ has done many positive things to the devotees. He perceives that in the villages a new kind of communion and unity among the *Khrist Bhaktas* is being formed. Although coming from different

618 Joining the church as baptised members also means joining the *dalits*.

619 Community is more important than the individual in India. Baptism is an individual decision and deed which implies distancing yourself from the collective.

620 Meena from the village of Belvania had been beaten up by her husband several times in front of the whole village and the villagers encouraged him to beat her more when she insisted on being a devotee of Christ. He beat her with an iron rod and finally left her thinking she was dead. But she recovered and later seeing her faith, her husband became a devotee of Christ. Similar stories are many.

castes, they all belong to and worship Jesus and show signs of sharing. The faith has already shown its results in the social changes. Child marriages are not practiced, girls are being educated, cleanliness is improved, family relations are stronger, parents are caring for their children and reconciliation in the home and between families has brought peace in the villages.

With regard to the future of the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement, he is not very pleased with the idea of baptising the devotees and making them members of the church. He feels that baptising them is putting a complete full stop to their thirst for the Word of God and for spiritual nourishment. According to him once baptised, the devotees feel equal to priests and nuns, deem it their right to be like them economically and demand from the priests all the comforts the priests and nuns have, namely, better food, a big house, vehicle, etc.

For the future, he envisages a different kind of membership and communion for the devotees. He visualizes a kind of initiation or consecration ceremony called *dīkṣā* as practiced in Hinduism. Such a ceremony could be used as an initiation into full devotees of Christ. This initiation ceremony could be conferred on them after a certain period of time and during which their commitment to Christ is confirmed. Once *dīkṣā* is taken they shall be considered as fully what he calls a Hindu Christian. Unless an initiation ceremony is introduced, he thinks the devotees tend to leave the movement too easily and also could have a divided loyalty, i.e., Christ could be seen as one of the gods. A ceremony like *dīkṣā* will not separate them from their Hindu brethren. This, he thinks will also make them feel both Hindu and Christian at the same time. Additionally, this will be an incentive for the priests to consider them as their own people and to give them personal attention, the lack of which at the moment is hurting the movement.

Fr. James sees the movement as a spiritual revolution and his work as ministry of faith-formation of the *Khrist Bhaktas*. What is important for him is the faith in Christ, which he finds more in *Khrist Bhaktas* than in the Catholics. He sees *Bhaktas* as thirsting for the Word of God. According to him, the charismatic elements and the *āśram* atmosphere best suits the *Khrist Bhaktas*. The physical healing they gain is the result of the inner healing they receive. Faith in Christ gives them a new vision and a new way of life, which challenges them to see the world differently. As a result, they get a new freedom: from sinful life, from social and other bondages, social problems, addictions, etc. They now discover the meaning of religion in a different way and experience freedom from the clutches of evil spirits and ancestral deities. God in Jesus is no more for them someone to be feared, but is someone who loves them and is to be loved by them. Due to the inner healing the family situations and mutual relationships improve. Their testimony is published in the magazine and that gives them an incentive to walk the testimony. He points out that once baptised, the devotees lose interest in the matters of faith and have less thirst for the Word of God. They then show more interest in financial matters. From his experience in the Yesu Dham *āśram*,

he sees the importance of keeping the *āśram* as *āśram* and not turning it into a parish⁶²¹.

For him new wine needs new wineskins. He is convinced that the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement is like a new wine and it needs a new wineskin. He wants to keep the *Khrist Bhaktas* away from the traditional Catholics. Mixing with them would be of no benefit, both to the already Christians and to the baptised *Bhaktas*; instead it will affect both of them negatively. At the same time, he has no specific idea on how to preserve them. He foresees that as Christianity grew out of Judaism, so will the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement grow out of Christianity. The *Khrist Bhaktas* will not fit into the traditional church structure. Therefore, he pleads for a new model. To begin with, at least he wants to see changes in the traditional liturgical form where due importance is given to the Word of God, healing prayer, etc.

Fr. Ranjit wants the *Khrist Bhaktas* to be sustained as *Khrist Bhaktas*. He thinks that God has baptised them with the Spirit and so it is not necessary for them to be baptised with water. He believes that they already belong to Christ. The Church has to find ways to accept them as members without damaging their cultural life. He thinks that now the Church is not yet open or mature enough to accept them as its members. He wants to envisage this movement as a new or different way of being church. He is of the opinion that the *Khrist Bhaktas* are bringing in a new revelation to the Church, a new path in evangelization and a new model of living a committed life to Christ. Although many people come to the movement to receive physical or spiritual healing, once they experience the healing, they become devotees and are willing to suffer for their faith in Christ. He wants to see the Church accept the *Khrist Bhaktas* as *Bhaktas* and as well as members of the Church. He sees Church as a pilgrim Church and all those who are committed to Christ as co-pilgrims. He is pained at the discrimination practiced during the distribution of Holy Communion. He is convinced that the *Khrist Bhaktas* are more eager to receive the Holy Communion than the Catholics, but he expresses his helplessness. Presently, the *Bhaktas* are told that the Word of God is the *prasād* (communion) for them while for the Catholics it is the Eucharist. But he asks why not they also be allowed to share the Body of Christ?

Sr. Vincentia says that mostly people come to the *āśram* for healing. However, after receiving the healing they come to Jesus and become his devotees. There are also other people who visit the *āśram* for gaining peace of mind. People are troubled in several ways. They find peace in the *āśram* and as a result continue to be devoted to Christ. In some cases, even when family members oppose, they come to the *āśram* and later, seeing their faith, sometimes their family members also come and become *Bhaktas*. She considers faith as a gift of God, and given to the devotees by God. She says that some devotees read the Bible and weep as if the Word of God was touching their hearts. They are enticed by

⁶²¹ He says the *āśram* was made a parish and the parish constructed a cemetery in the compound. The devotees do not like to come to the area with a cemetery.

several themes in the Bible and captivated by a God who calls and loves them personally. A catharsis happens in their lives when the Word of God is preached in the *āśram*. She thinks that by baptising them, the devotees will lose their interest in faith matters. From her experience, the devotees were happy to be baptised, but once baptised they are not happy. Such baptised ones feel that the rules and regulations of the Church, such as attendance of compulsory Sunday Eucharist, keep them tied down.

3.9.2. *The Vision of the Bishop and the Diocesan Priests*

Raphy Manjaly, the bishop of Varanasi diocese⁶²², foresees the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement growing bigger and stronger. He intends to start two *āśrams* in other civil districts of his diocese (not in the civil district of Varanasi) to cater to the *Khrist Bhaktas*. He has sent catechists and other personnel as a team to the Matridham *āśram* with a view to train them for working for the *Khrist Bhaktas*. Accordingly, he plans to place 30 catechists in the *āśram* to train them for the future.

As of now, Manjaly regards this as a movement of the Spirit and an answer to the spiritual thirst of the people. Basically, for him, it is a spiritual movement, meeting the needs of the people and spreading by word of mouth. The Spirit, he feels, is active and when people are awakened to the Spirit a movement takes place. It is a *kairos* where social barriers between castes and other differences are broken down and a community is formed. On account of their faith in Christ, the devotees are becoming better human beings and are empowered to breaking down barriers. They are transforming themselves and integrating the Gospel message into their lives. As a result, peace in the families and between families is heralded. This faith gives them strength to face life's rough and tough situations and enables them to overcome temptations. Therefore, it is a healing movement coming from God. They lead a life centred on the Word of God. According to him, Christians are advised by the Second Vatican Council to: "Go back to the Word of God". This is what is being followed by the devotees. They are leading a life centred on the Word of God. The devotees are making sacrifices; they are fasting, praying, and living a life of discipleship of Christ with no enticement or attractions given to them.

At the same time, Manjaly sees the present situation of the *Khrist Bhaktas* as a short term community. Therefore, concerning the future of the *Khrist Bhaktas*, he reckons with two possible ways or levels of following Christ. The first group, according to him, will remain as *Khrist Bhaktas*, while the second group will enter more deeply into the faith and may enter into the community of Christians. Personally, for him, both ways are acceptable.

The life of the first group, namely, those who shall follow Christ as *Khrist Bhaktas*, could be considered as a different level of discipleship. Manjaly be-

⁶²² Raphy Manjaly was transferred to the diocese of Allahabad in October 2013.

believes that God speaks to the individual, to the heart of the individual. On the one hand, God is revealed through the Word of God, through sacraments, etc. On the other hand, He reveals Himself in the heart of individuals. We have no access to the “sacred person”. He considers this type of living (as *Khrist Bhaktas*) as a model worth considering, as a new way of being church. He is convinced that no violence should be done to the way people live the Christian message. He wants the culture of the people to be preserved. He finds happiness in Christ being known to many people. He says that we shall do no violence to the freedom of individuals. Our duty is to proclaim the Word and it is God who gives results. Concerning those who want to join the Christian community as baptised members, he speaks about the general policy of the diocese. Although a few priests were too enthusiastic and baptised some in earlier days, now the diocese is against converting people without proper teaching and instruction at least for a minimum period of three years. He reiterates that evangelization should not be done like a business. It needs a conducive atmosphere. Mission and evangelization, for him, are the sharing of a personal experience, the experience of being touched by Christ. We share what has been, as scripture says, “touched and seen”⁶²³. “We have seen him about whom Moses said”⁶²⁴.

Manjaly is concerned about the operation of some Christian denominations that baptise devotees without enough preparation. The *Khrist Bhaktas* do not know which is which. He thinks that Hindu fundamentalist groups can cause problems for the Catholics, as they are the visible church. The denominational groups are not explicitly visible – some are genuine and are willing to suffer and die for Christ, while some want only to increase numbers⁶²⁵. Therefore, the Catholics do the work of evangelization and the denominational groups baptise. Therefore, there is a dilemma where Catholics become losers in gaining the number while becoming the object of the wrath of the Hindu fundamentalist groups. Nevertheless, we are still in the process of discernment.

One of the possible future dangers to this movement according to Manjaly is the possibility of leading to emotionalism if the movement is not well channelled. Since the charismatic elements are prominent, the leaders have to be careful not to let it become one-sided. Another threat is the possibility of separatism and personality cult. If the people in the lead are not sufficiently enlightened, it can cause such pitfalls.

The priests of the diocese have diverse opinions about the present status and the future of the *Khrist Bhaktas*. The majority of the priests are of the opinion that they be admitted to the Church. Fr. Wilfred Louis, a 78 year old retired priest thinks it as a good movement. He remembers how he had worked his

623 Cf. 1 Jn.1,1.

624 Cf. Jn.1,45.

625 There is a story of some non-Catholic groups distributing a leaflet in front of the Catholic Church to the Hindu pilgrims on the occasion of the great *kumbh melā* (which occurs once every 12 years). The leaflet described the Hindu gods as mere lifeless images, creations of the devil, etc., and asked them to be converted to the true God in Christ. The bishop says that these groups come and distribute the offending materials and then go away, but as the church we have to stay here.

whole life in the villages trying to bring people to Christ, but now through this movement people are coming in search of Christ. He thinks that they should soon be accepted into the Church by baptism. Fr. Rojan, a young priest, wants to consider the movement as a means of evangelization. He says in the earlier days the people were first given material things and then later the Church wanted to give them Christ, but once the people were happy with the material gains, Christ was no longer wanted. Here, first Christ is given so there is no requirement any more to give material things. Many young priests like him feel that the *Khrish Bhaktas* need to be made members of the Church. Fr. William, another young priest, also feels that the devotees should be baptised and made members of the Church. Similar is the view of Fr. Casper, a young priest for whom it is a means for evangelization. When pointed out to him that the baptised ones leave the Church and are not faithful to the Christian call, he puts it down to the wrong catechisms. He says that they left the Church because they were not prepared and catechised properly. Therefore, he feels that if the *Khrish Bhaktas* are instructed properly they can be baptised and they will not leave the Church. He says that most of the priests of his age want the *Bhaktas* to be baptised. They feel that to keep them as *Bhaktas* is futureless for them since they will be neither members of the Church nor members of Hinduism. So there is a need to make them belong to one community by baptising them.

Fr. Manuel D'Cunha, the parish priest of Mawiaya is not sure how the general policy from the diocese is followed, but thinks that every priest behaves as the boss in the parish and follows his own policy. According to him, the devotees should not be baptised as individuals. Only if someone wants to be a Christian with his whole family, then he takes the steps. In order to avoid legal complications, he asks those who want to receive baptism to get an official approval, such as an affidavit approved from the civil agencies. For him, this movement is more akin to catechumens.

There are some priests who consider the *Bhaktas* as communities based on Christ. Fr. Roque, who was twice vicar general, calls them Christ-based communities. He believes that it is the duty of the Church and its leaders to form such communities. Fr. Santhosh, a young priest, sees them as catechumens, although for him this movement need not be considered as a means to make them members of the Church. He sees that the devotees experience a lot of freedom in this movement.

There are some priests who want to look for new possibilities concerning the future of the *Khrish Bhaktas*. Fr. Louis Braggs believes that until now normally only the *dalits* were baptised into the Church. Some of them come only for material gains. This stops the other caste members from taking the Christian faith seriously. He likes to look at the *Khrish Bhakta* Movement as a possible model for the Church. Similarly, Fr. Simon P. wants to search for new possibilities of communion. He says that now only the *dalits* are baptised and they feel that they are climbing the social ladder as a result, whereas members of other castes prefer to remain as *Bhaktas*. He remembers that some *Khrish Bhaktas* were baptised at

his parish after preparing them for 4 to 5 years, but after 10 years he feels they are causing trouble for the Church. The Christians want their people to be appointed to schools run by the Church as teachers even though they are neither trained nor able to teach. They come to the Church only to gain admission in the schools or for getting their kids admitted in hostels run by the Church or for creating trouble in the Church. Prince, a newly ordained priest who works with the *Khrist Bhaktas*, wants the *Bhaktas* to be kept as *Bhaktas*. He finds in them deep faith in Christ. According to him, the *Khrist Bhaktas* come to him to hear the Word of God, and to be touched by Christ. They do not look for any material gains. He wants to consider this as a new way of being church.

Fr. Ivan Joseph, the former vicar general of the diocese, feels strongly against the practice of baptising *Bhaktas*. He feels that once baptised the enthusiasm of the *Khrist Bhaktas* is lost. Their regularity in practicing the faith disappears. He remembers the example of those *Bhaktas* he had baptised in a place called Ghazipur. He thinks that it is the general trend. Therefore, he wants to keep them as devotees. Many people come for healing. Some have personal devotion to Christ. He thinks that if *satsangs* with healing services are held anywhere in this part of the world, people will come in good numbers and join the movement, for which the priests should have a willingness to serve the devotees, but he finds not many priests interested in doing so.

The diocese now runs two *āśrams* to cater for the needs of the *Khrist Bhaktas*. Three priests are working in one of the *āśrams* while one priest is working in another. How do the priests working in these *āśrams* visualize the future of the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement? Fr. Iswaranad, the present guru of the Shanti Dham *āśram* who earlier served as the guru of Yesu Dham, says that the devotees have stronger faith than the Catholics. The devotees come to get rid of the spell of evil spirits, to find remedy and protection from the bad eye, evil omens, and other spells of the devil, and look for cures from sickness and diseases. Some of them come as mere visitors but the majority gradually become devotees.

He is not envisaging the *Bhaktas* as baptised members of the Church. He reckons that the *Bhaktas* are baptised in faith. By baptizing them with water and making them members of the Church one creates problems both for the development of the Church and for the baptised. He says that only the *dalits* are eager to be baptised as is evidenced by those baptised in earlier days that are from the *dalit* community. He is not happy with the work of the denominational groups who invite the devotees to their prayer groups and baptise them too soon.

Fr. Francis Yagappan is a new staff member in the Yesu Dham *āśram* who will soon take charge as guru. He thinks that the movement is the work of the Spirit and so it is God who orders and arranges it. He feels that conversion has to take place for those persons who are working in the movement; they are to be converted to God fully. He himself decided to opt for this life after listening to

God in prayer⁶²⁶. He says that the *Khrist Bhaktas* do not belong to any religion. They do not belong to Christianity; they do not feel one with the Hindu communion. This, for him, is not an ideal situation and he wants to find a solution to it. Therefore, he is concerned about their future. For him, although they are not the body of Christ through sacraments, they are his body through faith. He wants to consider this movement as a Church with a difference. For him, it is the Church of the future.

Fr. Sonelal, the other staff member in the Yesu Dham *āśram*, wants to keep the *Bhaktas* as *Bhaktas*. He feels that once baptised they will lose interest in faith matters, but now they are devoted. He gives the example of his former parish where the baptised lacked zeal. He also feels that in cases when not all the members of a family are *Bhaktas*, it is not good to divide the family on the basis of religion.

Fr. Aloysius, the guru of the Shanti Dham *āśram*, thinks that the *Khrist Bhaktas* are thirsting for the Word of God and surrendering themselves to God. The Christians are not regular in the church whereas the *Khrist Bhaktas* are regular for prayer meetings. He also points out that no miracles are happening in the lives of the Christians, whereas many miracles are happening in the lives of the devotees. He thinks, for practical purposes also, the devotees should not be made Christians, as this will affect them badly when others might boycott their family from all social functions. He even feels that devotees shall not be allowed to mix with the present Christians in one community.

3.9.3. The Vision of IMS Leaders and Members

Fr. Abhishiktanand, the Provincial of the IMS congregation is proud about the movement and the contribution and leadership given by the IMS community⁶²⁷. He says that the IMS community in all its village-stations and houses in the province conducts monthly prayer meetings in order to attract *Khrist Bhaktas*. The IMS community is supporting the movement in all possible ways and have charted out several programmes for the growth of the movement. He sees many positives in the movement. The lives of the *Bhaktas* have improved as a result of their faith. They have become more sincere in their inter-personal relationships; they are becoming more sensitive and concerned about their neighbours. It has reduced tensions in the families and the devotees are becoming more generous.

Concerning the future of the movement, he feels that it will grow from strength to strength. Regarding their admittance into the Church, he feels that the policy has to be developed by the diocese. He thinks that now there are opposing

⁶²⁶ He says that when he came for the first time in the *āśram* around 60 to 70 people came to attend the *satsaṅg*. He prayed to God and asked God that if God had called him to this ministry, let him be shown a sign by increasing the number of devotees. In the following week around 150-170 people came for the meeting.

⁶²⁷ There are some IMS members who are not happy with the stress on charismatic elements in the movement. They want the IMS to be more socially active, socially involved, and give stress to people's empowerment and education. They say that charismatic elements do not help in bringing justice to the poor.

views on baptising the *Khrist Bhaktas*. Personally, he is not against giving them baptism and providing them with a community. However, at the same time, he is against dividing the families and communities on the basis of their faith. He does not want to baptise a few families in a village in such cases where the other village members are against those being baptised and, as a result, the larger village community boycotts them.

Fr. Jerome Sylvester, the vicar provincial considers the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement as an IMS movement. He says that the movement was the result of the response the *āśram* gave to the needs of the people. He thinks that it is not centred on any person but on the *āśram*. What is important for the devotees is the Word of God preached to them. He looks at it as a subaltern movement and finds sociological reasons for the emergence of the movement. Concerning the future of the movement, he feels that it will continue to grow, but he also thinks that they are still in the process of discernment.

Fr. Anand, IMS, has been associated with the movement from the very beginning. He thinks that the needs of the *Khrist Bhaktas* are different from the needs of the Christians. The *Khrist Bhaktas* are happy with the experience from the charismatic elements in the prayer. Various sufferings bring them to the movement. Their faith is simple and they pray even for their livestock. He says that the women and people from the lower caste feel a lot of self-respect in the movement. For example, when a low caste woman comes to the *āśram* she stands shoulder to shoulder to pray with men and women of higher castes. They all stand as equals and pray aloud in one voice. She/he experiences a kind of new communion, a kind of equality. This gives them a sense of new identity. He says that because of this reason many of the *Bhaktas* want to be called Christians. Hence, he thinks that it is alright for them to be baptised if they are eager about it. However, at the same time he does not want them to be made part of the already existing Catholic city parishes where they will be made to sit on the chair, stop their spontaneous prayer, etc., and eventually lose their interest in faith matters. Presently he finds in them a deep desire to listen to the Word of God, which he thinks they will miss once they join the parishes. In many parishes, either it is not preached enough or the speakers do not live it, he feels.

As it stands now Fr. Anand considers the *Khrist Bhakta* movement as a model of being church. He finds many positives in this movement, namely, a psycho-spiritual and social transformation taking place. Even a cultural transformation is occurring. He says even when the culture is getting transformed the devotees are not taken into a foreign culture. He considers it as a way of evangelizing the culture and not “Westernizing” it.

Fr. Premraj, IMS, who worked in the *āśram* and has been the parish priest in Benipur (under which the *āśram* comes) for 5 years, says that the devotees are very keen to receive Jesus. At the same time, he feels that they are not really interested in becoming members of the Church. From his experience, he thinks that some kind of initiation is needed. However, he does not want to take the *Bhaktas* away from the village communities. He is against creating tensions in the village

between devotees of Christ and non-devotees. At the same time, he is afraid that in the long run they might find themselves neither in the Church nor in the Hindu community. He is searching for a solution to this situation. He says that he wants to find a way by which the devotees be accepted as members of the Church and at the same time they remain integrated in the villages as members of the village community.

Brother Rajesh, IMS, had lived in the village-house at Benipur in 1976 and returned to the same village house in 2009. He recollects his life in the village in earlier days when the IMS members invited the village children to join them for the evening prayer-meeting including reading from the Bible, reflection, intercessions, *bhajans*, and distribution of *prasād*. They visited the villages, and sometimes conducted prayers in the houses of villagers. He thinks their works in the village and their relationship with the villagers were so deep that the villagers called the IMS community “our members”. He thinks that with some preparations the *Khrish Bhaktas* can be admitted to the Church.

Fr. Rakesh, IMS, who has been involved with the *Khrish Bhakta* Movement for a long time says that people come mostly for healing. He considers it as a spiritual movement. Moreover, for him, the movement is not based on Anil Dev, since people look to the *āśram* as the holy place. Concerning the future of the movement, he reckons that it needs a different model than the present church model. The present church structure cannot accommodate this movement into itself without making some changes. He points out how the first Christian community and the Jerusalem Council decided to do away with the question of circumcision for the gentile Christians while allowing the Jewish Christians to continue its practice. He says that the local Church has to evolve something similar. The local Church has the responsibility to develop liturgy and theology suited to the needs of the *Bhaktas*.

3.10. The *Khrish Bhakta* Movement and the Other Churches

There are a number of Protestant and Pentecostal churches working in and around the area. The important ones are the Church of Banaras, the Methodist Church, the New Life Movement, the Seventh Day Adventist, the Bethel Full Gospel Church, the Emmanuel Church, the Assembly of God, the Assembly of Believers, and the Mission Kashi⁶²⁸. There are also a good number of individual or small group church planters working here.

Many Protestant churches have done excellent work of evangelization even before the Catholics started the mission in the villages. The leaders related to the *Khrish Bhakta* Movement acknowledge the committed and fearless work of the

⁶²⁸ The number of churches, denominations, groups, and individuals working in this part of the world is much larger. We have not made a study of these groups.

Protestant churches. Their work of evangelization was done with much dedication and with a willingness to go to any extent for the faith, even to die as martyr.

In relation to the efforts of inculturation, some of the Protestant groups have done extremely well. Some groups have opened their centre on the banks of Ganges for studying Hinduism. It is called the “School of Hindu Studies” where the students wear the saffron coloured-cloths just like the Hindu (*Śaivite*) monks. They study the Hindu customs, rituals, practices, canons, ceremonies, etc. from the Hindu scholars and experts and use it for evangelization.

At the same time, there are a number of individuals and groups as well who are baptising the *Khrist Bhaktas* too soon. After befriending the *Khrist Bhaktas* in the *āśram* or on the way to the *āśram* they offer to pray for the devotees and visit their homes to conduct prayers. Later, they invite the *Khrist Bhaktas* to join their prayer meetings and soon baptise them. Some such pastors are trained for 3 months and are sent to the villages for a period of 3 years with salary and house-rent. If they baptise a fixed minimum number of the people they are allowed to continue; if not, then they are transferred to another village. Such groups and individuals do not seem sensitive to the culture of the people nor the possible tensions in the society, but are interested in solely increasing the number of members in their church⁶²⁹. For the *Khrist Bhaktas* those who preach to them about Christ are the same, be they Catholic or non-Catholic. Sometimes they leave such denominational groups and return to the *āśram*, for instance, when the *Khrist Bhaktas* are told not to venerate Mary.

3.11. Conclusion

In this chapter, we have made a survey of the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement focusing on its origin, growth, development, organization, and functioning. We have researched into its background and the birth of the movement in the charismatic renewal programmes. The investigation has brought forth the factors or elements which contributed to its origin and growth. Our study revealed the central role played by the Matridham *āśram* with its various activities, and the key role, support, and leadership given by Anil Dev. Our description has presented the status of the movement and the roles played by the staff of the *āśram*. The guidance and leadership taken by the *aguās* in the villages are also made clear in our study. We have also shed light on the efforts undertaken by the diocese of Varanasi through its *āśrams* and parishes. Finally, we have given a glimpse of the vision of the leaders and the local ecclesiastical authorities about the future of the movement.

⁶²⁹ It is also true that some of the Catholic priests are also too fast in converting the devotees and making them part of the parish.

Now we have a bird's eye view of the whole movement. However, how do the *Khrist Bhaktas* practice their new-found faith? What changes does faith in Christ bring to their lives? What is the role of this movement in inculturation in the area of community building? What are the real problems and questions this movement brings with it? These questions will be taken up in the following chapters.

Chapter 4

The Christianity of the *Khrist Bhaktas*

4.0. Introduction

The point of departure for our enquiry into the *Khrist Bhakta* movement was the inadequacies of the earlier efforts of inculturation attempted in India. We had seen how these attempts were limited to the elite and not acceptable to the ordinary people. Such efforts, including the *āśram* movement, introduced with a view to inculturation, did not find a home with the people of other faiths in India either. In the backdrop of such an ambience, ordinary people, the majority of whom are Hindus, have accepted and propagated the *Khrist Bhakta* movement. The previous chapter has given us a brief history of the origin, development, and organization of this movement, especially as it takes shape in the Matridham *āśram*. The present chapter shall present evidence of how concretely these people practice their faith in Christ. We shall also present the lessons and new questions their practices of Christianity give us for our purpose of finding a model for inculturation.

First, we shall start with presenting the Christianity as practiced by the *Khrist Bhaktas*. We shall introduce the religious and spiritual practices of the devotees at the *āśram*, at home, and in the village. We will include not only the daily, weekly, and monthly religious practices but also the religious practices at festivities. Our presentation includes both their individual as well as communal religious practices along with the role played by the spiritual or holy objects important to them. This shall be followed by an appraisal of their spiritual experiences and how their new-found faith in Christ has affected their social relations, social commitment, and cultural world. Subsequently, we shall present the cultural world of the devotees manifesting how they take part in the festivals and rites of passage. Finally, we shall give a brief note on their self-perception.

Second, we perform a broadened evaluation of the movement based on its strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats⁶³⁰. This will provide us with an opportunity to grapple with the overall portrayal and performance of the move-

630 We have relied on a SWOT-analysis tool. SWOT gives a list of an organization's strengths and weaknesses as indicated by an analysis of its resources and capabilities, plus a list of the threats and opportunities. See details in, D.W. PICKTON, & S. WRIGHT 'What is SWOT in Strategic Analysis?', in *Strategic Change* 7, 1998, 2, pp. 101-109. It is normally used to assess the performance of an organization. We do not make use of this method in a strictly methodological sense as the nature of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement is different from a normal organization. For details of this method, see R.D. STACEY, *Strategic Management and Organisational Dynamics*, London, Pitman Publishing 1993, p. 52. SWOT dates back to 1960, but it was developed by Weihrich in 1982. See details in H. WEIHRICH, 'The TOWS Matrix. A Tool for Situational Analysis', in *Long Range Planning* 15, 1982, 2, pp. 54-66.

ment. Additionally, it will give us an opportunity to look at the movement more clearly and give us a list of its strong and weak points. This evaluation will help clarify the contribution of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement to inculturation and community building in India. It will also present us with a roadmap of opportunities and threats for this movement in its future endeavours.

Third, we undertake an interpretation of the movement based on the criteria we have formulated earlier. The *Khrist Bhakta* movement has both Hindu and Christian elements. Our main objective here is to find out which framework the religious practices belong to. Therefore, we shall begin this section by giving a short presentation of both the Hindu and the Christian frameworks. Thereafter, we shall inspect each of these practices in order to trace the origin of the elements and their present use in the *Khrist Bhakta* movement and to discover and verify if they belong to a Hindu framework, a Christian framework or even a mixture of both. We shall also look for pointers to ascertain if there is any indication of change from one framework to the other. We also intend to find out how deep or peripheral those implied changes are. In order to help us to inspect and identify the elements behind the religious practices, we shall make use of contributions from scholars such as Robert Schreiter and Clifford Geertz.

Robert Schreiter shows how cultures have *ideational* elements (worldview, values, rules, and behaviour), *performantial* elements (rituals and roles) and *material elements* (language, symbols, food, clothing, housing and other artefacts)⁶³¹. He also shows that culture has a series of linking semiotic domains: religious, economic, political, social, and so on. A semiotic domain could be considered as an assemblage of cultural texts relating to one set of activities in culture, which are organized together by a single set of messages and metaphoric signs⁶³². Our enquiry is pivoted mostly on the religious domain of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement, although we have included their social relations, social commitment, cultural festivals, rites of passage, as well as their self-perception. This we have done in order to help us understand more clearly the religious domain and the possible changes in the framework. The disclosure of the religious domain happens in the various religious expressions⁶³³. These expressions are “the living essence of religion, religion in action”⁶³⁴. Evidence of the religious commitment is visible in the participation on these religious behaviours⁶³⁵. As

631 R.J. SCHREITER, *The New Catholicity*, p. 79. This semiotic model of cultural dimensions was originally developed by J. LEONHOFF, and Schreiter explicates it for the use of local theologies.

632 R.J. SCHREITER, *Constructing Local Theologies*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1985, p. 69.

633 E. ARWECK & W.J.F. KEENAN, ‘Introduction. Material Varieties of Religious Expression’, in W.J.F. KEENAN & E. ARWECK (eds.), *Materializing Religion. Expressions, Performance and Ritual*, Hampshire, Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2006, p. 2. See also R. RAPPAPORT, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 3.

634 R.H. CRAPO, *Anthropology of Religion. The Unity and Diversity of Religions*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 2003, p. 180.

635 *Ibid.* See also A.F.C. WALLACE, *Religion. An Anthropological View*, New York, Random House, 1966, p. 107. Louis-Marie Chauvet stresses the priority of action over words in the religious rituals. The ritual action thus is much more important in understanding the religious domain. See L.M. CHAUVET, *Symbol and*

Schreiter mentions, mostly a single religious expression can contain all the above-mentioned elements such as the *ideational*, *performantial*, and *material*. In practice, the *material* and the *performantial* elements are the first to be seen and observed while the *ideational* elements are hidden behind, and therefore stand in need of interpretation. With a view of avoiding eclecticism, we have included in our investigation all the religious expressions of the devotees we have observed and who participated.

We shall therefore begin our interpretation by exploring each religious practice in order to identify the elements or, in the words of Clifford Geertz, diagnosing the “cultural texts”⁶³⁶ in these expressions and ascertain if they have a Hindu framework or a Christian framework. It is also possible that some elements are hybrid or have their place and use in both the frameworks. We shall include both the verbal (e.g., intercessions, praise and worship, *bhajans*, etc.) and non-verbal expressions (e.g., *ārītī*, lighting of the lamp, prayer meeting, etc.), which, in the words of Geertz, are the cultural texts. In this process of exploring the expressions, we shall look for possible underlying threads, which may indicate any change from one framework to another, or for the indicators of the formation of syncretic elements and processes⁶³⁷. The expressions are enigmatical and it is in this explication that the meanings of the expressions are made accessible to us⁶³⁸.

In order to get a better grip of the origin of *ideational* elements, we shall divide the expressions into two conglomerations, namely, those expressions that the devotees originally possessed before they became devotees of Christ, and those expressions that the devotees acquired as a result of their association with the Matridham *āśram*.

Simultaneously, we shall look for those *performantial* elements, which are featured in the religious domain and identify what functions these expressions have in the lives of the devotees. Geertz stresses the need to ask many questions in the process of interpretation. Complying with Geertz, Schreiter highlights the necessity of asking the right kinds of questions to allow the patterns to emerge⁶³⁹. Therefore, in our analysis, we shall include suitable and relevant questions to discern and interpret the *ideational* and *performantial* elements. We have also incorporated in our investigation and deliberation the roles played by the *material*

Sacrament. A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence, trans. P. MADIGAN & M. BEAUMONT, Minnesota, The Liturgical Press, 1995, p. 375.

636 According to Geertz the culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong. C. GEERTZ, *The Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays*, New York, Basic Books, 1973, p. 452.

637 Our field study was limited to a particular period and so we are aware that the process of change from one framework to another may not come under our observation. But still we are looking for indicators that suggest a possible change from one to another on the basis of our study of their expressions before associating with the *āśram* and after the association.

638 GEERTZ, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, p. 5. Religious actions can have more than one meaning. Some of them have their function as meaning, while for others it is the reference which gets meaning, and for others it is the intention which gives the meaning. See Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*. Cambridge, Cambridge University press 1999. pp. 69-100.

639 SCHREITER, *Constructing Local Theologies*, p. 56.

elements, or material objects (such as *prasād*, holy water, and blessed oil)⁶⁴⁰. Our intention here is to establish the framework behind these religious practices and the use of such objects.

Subsequently, we take up the examination of the faith expressions of the devotees at *āśram* using the above-mentioned methodological procedure. Later we shall scrutinize their religious practices at festivities and special occasions using the same procedure and methodology. Thereafter, we shall proceed to analyse and interpret their social relations and social commitment. Eventually, we will analyse their cultural festivals and celebrations to ascertain if we can observe a shift of worldview, that is to say a Hinduisation of Christianity or a Christianisation of Hinduism or any signs of syncretic processes.

Fourth, we shall evaluate our findings based on the criteria we have formulated in our earlier section. Our purpose in this section is to find out the contribution of the *Khrīst Bhakta* movement to the inculturation of the church in India. We have made our criteria specific to the local situation, suitable for our context, multiple in number, and include the insights from Indian theologians. We had developed them to find out and to decide how far an inculturation should be considered successful.

4.1. The Religious Practices of the *Khrīst Bhaktas*

4.1.1. *The Second Saturday and Sunday Satsaṅgs*

The devotees come to the Matridham *āśram* in large number on every Sunday and second Saturdays. As they enter the *āśram*, a good number of them touch the ground at the main entrance. Shortly after entering the *āśram*, some of them wash their legs while others their hands. They then proceed to the *darśan bhavan*. If the Holy Sacrament is placed in the *mandir*, they visit the Sacrament there⁶⁴¹. Even when the sacrament is not exposed in *darśan bhavan* and the doors are locked, many devotees stay at the entrance, bow or prostrate, and some even perform an *ārtī*. Thereafter, they proceed to the *mandir* but before entering the *mandir*, they sprinkle on themselves the water from the pond. Everyone does it no matter if one has already washed the feet or not. After leaving their shoes/slippers outside the *mandir*, they enter the *mandir* and prostrate themselves completely before the sacrament. Many mothers bring the forehead of their babies also down to the floor. Touching the ground with the forehead is for them important. Then most of them proceed to the grotto of Our Lady or *mariyalaya*. Some devotees first visit the *mariyalaya* and proceed to *mandir*. There they also leave their shoes/slippers outside, bow or touch the ground with their foreheads.

640 We have used the term elements to indicate only the objects since our effort is ultimately to indicate the *ideational* elements in practices, which are hidden behind the *material* and *performantial* elements.

641 On Second Saturdays and Sundays the Sacrament is exposed in the temple/*mandir* for the adoration, while on weekdays it is placed in the *darśan bhavan* where 24-hour adoration goes on.

Some devotees offer flowers (some even garland her statue), sweets, incense, fruit, etc. Most of them touch the statue of Our Lady to take her blessings before they proceed to the *satsaṅg bhavan* to attend the prayer meeting.

In the *satsaṅg bhavan* they listen to the preaching of the Word, join the singing of *bhajans* and prayers, listen to the witnesses, raise their voice in praise and worship, participate in the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and join in the healing prayer. While preaching, the preacher makes them repeat the Word of God after him. They sing and praise loudly and shout alleluia. Most devotees have learned by heart the *bhajans*, prayers and hymns by repeating them in the *āśram*.

The devotees remain in the *satsaṅg bhavan* and attend the whole programme from 11.00 to 16.00 on Sundays and from 10.00 to 16.00 on second Saturdays. All the *satsaṅgs* begin with the invocation of the Holy Spirit. Hymns, which plead for the showering of the Holy Spirit, are sung. While singing those hymns the community joins with louder voices, with clapping of hands, and beating of symbols. During the *satsaṅg*, some people come out of the *satsaṅg bhavan* to eat their meals, which they had carried with them. Those who come late or those who go out in between, continue to sing (in a lower voice) or join the prayers even while walking outside. The whole atmosphere is prayerful and they make their prayers with a great deal of devotion. It is a sight to see how the devotees long to look at the Blessed Sacrament when brought to the *satsaṅg bhavan* for public adoration. Some even try to touch the sacrament, or at least the priest who carries of the sacrament or his cloak⁶⁴². Others express their devotion by prostrating, bowing their head to the ground, and so on. Most people bring with them water and oil to be blessed and taken home. The Holy Spirit is invoked before benediction. The majority of the miracles and cures take place at the time of benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

Every Sunday and second Saturdays, some *Bhaktas* sit in two places (the *mandir* and *vardān*) for intercessions. Members of the *āśram* sit in *vardān* while devotees sit in the *mandir*. The devotees who sit in *mandir* start to pray from morning around 09.00 and join the large gathering in the *satsaṅg bhavan* at the time of adoration (at 15.00) when the Blessed Sacrament is brought to the *satsaṅg bhavan* for public adoration.

Some *Bhaktas* attend the Catholic liturgy, participate actively in the singing of *bhajans*, and listen to the Word of God. On the last Sunday of every month, around 150 devotees attend the monthly *satsaṅg* and as part of the retreat, they join the Eucharist. They listen to the preaching eagerly, sing and recite the prayers in loud voices and show more devotion during the liturgy. Many people, especially the nuns who come to the *āśram* for retreat, are impressed by the faith of the devotees. According to the priests and nuns, this participation of the *Khrist*

642 The present researcher had the experience of carrying the Sacrament. People from both sides tried to touch the Sacrament by pulling it towards them and many touched my cloak, hands or feet. Some people placed their hands in the way so that while walking I might step on their hands or at least my feet might touch their hands.

Bhaktas in the liturgy rekindles the faith of the Christians⁶⁴³. According to Anil Dev, this has improved the quality of the faith of the Catholics.

4.1.2. The Family Prayer

The *Bhaktas* have the practice of family prayer. Before becoming the *Bhaktas*, they did not have any ritual similar to a family prayer. Many of them had a family deity placed in one room where they offered *pūjā* to the deity. The *pūjā* consisted of lighting the lamp (*diya*), incensing the deity, and saying personal prayers or chanting the mantra and *ārtī*. One member of the family, either the father or mother, performed it. Other members of the family did not take part in it. Once they became the *Khrish Bhaktas*, they took the family deity to the *āśram* to be buried under the cross of Christ and now keep the picture of Jesus and other Christian symbols at home. They also wear Christian symbols such as the Cross, Rosary, etc. If the members of the whole family are *Bhaktas*, then they have a special place for prayer. After becoming the devotees of Christ, all the family members gather for the family prayer, which is done mostly in the evening. It includes lighting of the lamp, intercessory prayer, the Rosary, sometimes reading from the Bible, *bhajans*, praise and worship. The prayer is concluded with the *ārtī*. The more devoted spend one or two hours in prayer⁶⁴⁴. The women mostly lead the prayer and perform the *ārtī*. Some *Bhaktas*, normally the women, pray in the morning also. The Morning Prayer is a short one where they limit it to lighting of the lamp, small personal prayers, and an *ārtī*. They also display in a prominent place the pictures of Jesus, Mary, the Bible⁶⁴⁵, a Cross, a prayer book, and a devotional hymns book published by the *āśram*⁶⁴⁶. Before becoming devotees, it was not normal for them to have their religious symbols displayed in prominent places. Rather, the display of religious symbols was limited to one room or place where the family deity was installed, and normally away from prominent places.

4.1.3. The Village Prayer Meetings

The *Bhaktas* gather in the villages under the guidance of an *aguā* for the common prayer meeting once a week. Conducted normally in the house of an *aguā* at 12.00, the prayer meetings are mostly attended by women. The gathering is generally of small size, sometimes with just 10 to 15 women, and other times, in certain villages, from 30 to 50 people. Additionally, those who wish to become devotees also join and ask for prayers. Some devotees, who are not able to go to the *āśram* due to either objection from families or some other reasons like sickness,

643 Many nuns and priests who came to *āśram* for retreats have also reported to the present researcher that they have nowhere else seen such a faith.

644 People like Mr. Shanta Prasad, spends 3 hours in prayer with longer time for reading the Bible.

645 Some people keep the Bible covered in saffron coloured cloth (as in the Hindu custom).

646 There are also people like Urmila Patel and Prakash who can afford, have special rooms for prayer that is decorated with holy pictures.

also attend the village meetings. Sometimes the head catechist from the *āśram* joins the prayer.

The prayer meetings begin with the lighting of the lamp and singing of *bhajans*. One person leads *bhajans* while the group repeats after the leader. Most of the time Hindi *bhajans* from the book published by the *āśram* are sung. Sometimes the devotees sing *bhajans* composed by some of the devotees themselves in their local dialect (*Bhojpuri*). Such *bhajans* are rather longer and narrate the events and incidents from the Gospel. Mostly, while singing the *bhajans*, the devotees join by ringing bells, playing tambourine (*kartāl*)⁶⁴⁷ or clapping their hands. Intercessory prayers, praise and worship follow it. Normally, the singing of *bhajans*, intercessory prayers and praise and worship are sandwiched together. The *aguā* guides it, while the others repeat it after him/her. The praise and worship include rather louder shouting of alleluia. During the prayer meetings, the devotees intercede for various needs of the people in the village, especially for the sick. Towards the end of the prayer meeting, the healing prayer is held if sick people are present. The devotees extend their hands towards the sick while making the healing prayer. The prayer session lasts for three hours. If a priest is present, he preaches the Word of God and mostly leads the healing prayer⁶⁴⁸. It is concluded with *ārtī* and distribution of *prasād*. Normally, a young woman or a girl performs the *ārtī*, while the congregation stands up and sings the *ārtī* hymn with clapping of hands and beating of *kartāl*. The *ārtī* is given to the picture of Jesus and then taken to all present for reception. The devotees receive the *ārtī* and most of the people place some money as a form of offering in the *ārtī* plate.

4.1.4. Devotion to Mary

The devotees have a special devotion to Mary and address her as *mā*, which means mother. They have the pictures of Mary displayed at home. Most women wear rosaries around their neck. When the devotees come to the *āśram*, normally all of them first visit the grotto of Our Lady before going to the *satsaṅg bhavan* to join in the prayer meeting. Furthermore, even while the preaching or other prayers are conducted in the *satsaṅg bhavan*, a number of devotees continue to visit the grotto. They spend much time in the grotto praying before the statue of Our Lady. Many people bring flowers and sweets and offer it at the grotto. Even when they walk in to pay a short visit to the Blessed Sacrament in the *āśram* they include a visit to the grotto. For many families, the Rosary is the main item in their family prayer⁶⁴⁹.

4.1.5. Monthly Retreats

647 *Kartāl* (literally means the rhythm of the hand) is made of wooden blocks with holes for fingers and circular copper plates.

648 The present researcher had to preach every time he visited the prayer meeting in the village.

649 When the Protestant pastors tell them not to pray to Mary, they leave the Protestant group and come to the *āśram*.

Around 250 devotees attend the three-day monthly retreats conducted in the *āśram* every month. They are conducted on the last Friday, Saturday, and Sunday of the month. They begin at 10.00 on Friday and end at 16.00 on Sunday. During the retreat-days, the devotees stay at the *āśram* and a strict timetable-based programme is arranged for them⁶⁵⁰. The retreat is the occasion for catechising and teaching. It is also a special experience for the people to pray together and to pray aloud⁶⁵¹. Devotees belonging to several caste groups learn to live together and share the same food. Those who attend the retreats are taught about faith and Christian values and are led in expressive prayer.

4.1.6. Annual Charismatic Convention

The annual charismatic convention is a big event in the life of the devotees as it is an occasion for spiritual renewal. It is a three-day event organized with publicity⁶⁵². It is an occasion for new devotees to join the movement and for the former ones to deepen their faith in Christ. In this huge gathering, many miracles happen at the time of healing services. Those who get cured and experience miracles come on to the stage and give witness to their experiences. These witnesses to miracles, coupled with the healing services and other group prayers and expressions of faith, deepen the faith of the new devotees⁶⁵³.

4.1.7. Lent and Holy Week

Lent is the most important spiritual renewal period for the devotees. Some devotees fast for 40 days with only fruit and water. Some fast during the day and eat after sunset. Fridays in Lent are important for the devotees. They keep a strict fast on these Fridays without eating anything at all. The Sunday *satsaṅg* at the *āśram* is shifted to Fridays during Lent. The *satsaṅg* during these Fridays include the Way of the Cross also.

The Holy Week celebration is also an elaborate one for the devotees. They come to the *āśram* on Maundy Thursday and attend the service of foot washing and adoration usually arranged at 18.00. This is followed by the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the *satsaṅg bhavan* until midnight. The majority of the devotees stay back in the *āśram* to attend the Good Friday services while some of them from the neighbourhood go home. After midnight, the adoration is conducted throughout the night in *darśan bhavan*. Some devotees continue to join in the adoration even after midnight. The devotees also celebrate Good Friday and Easter with enthusiasm⁶⁵⁴.

650 More details of the monthly retreat are in our earlier section 3.7.3.

651 In Hinduism, praying aloud or the vocal prayer is nearly absent. Community prayer is also absent as a form of Hindu religious practice.

652 Notices are printed out and distributed in the villages, and it is announced in the *āśram* and in mission centres and parishes etc.

653 See for more details in our earlier section 3.7.3.

654 Details of which is given in our earlier section 3.7.3.

4.1.8. Christmas

The Christmas celebration is an occasion of joy for the devotees and a crowd of around 10,000 people attend the celebration. They come to the *āśram* on the eve of Christmas and spend the whole night in celebration⁶⁵⁵. Besides the liturgy and adoration, it includes a two-hour long Christmas play, film on biblical themes, singing of devotional folk songs, etc. Besides the staff of the *āśram*, other guest preachers are invited for the celebration. Musical instruments played by experts assist the singing.

4.1.9. Gurupūrṇimā

Gurupūrṇimā is a special day in the lives of *Khrist Bhaktas*⁶⁵⁶. Following the Hindu tradition of celebrating the *gurupūrṇimā*, they come to the *āśram* to pay their respects to the guru and to seek his blessings. The *āśram* has taught them that Christ is their eternal Guru. Although they acknowledge Christ as their eternal Guru, they look to Anil Dev as their human guru whose blessings they seek on this day. He sits on the floor on the stage and people touch his feet or legs while he gives them his blessings⁶⁵⁷. The devotees are given *gurumantrā* and they offer a small amount of money as a token of their gratitude⁶⁵⁸.

4.1.10. Holy Water, Oil, and Prasād

The majority of the devotees carry home the holy water and the blessed oil blessed on Sundays and the second Saturdays at the time of the Benediction. People collect water in bottles from the pond in front of the *mandir* in the *āśram*. They buy oil from the shops outside the *āśram* and bring it for the blessing. At the time of Benediction, the priest asks the people to keep the oil and water (or any other item) for blessing raised in their hands, while he blesses with the Sacrament. The devotees then carry the water and oil home and preserve it for various needs. Some devotees preserve the holy water blessed on Easter for the whole year⁶⁵⁹. The water blessed on normal Sundays and second Saturdays is used for drinking as a holy *prasād* of Jesus, as a holy medicine against all kinds

⁶⁵⁵ See for details our earlier section 3.7.3.

⁶⁵⁶ It is the day to remember guru and take initiation into spiritual life. See details about *gurupūrṇimā* in our earlier section 3.7.3.

⁶⁵⁷ In the year 2010 the *gurupūrṇimā* fell on a Sunday and seeing the huge crowd Anil Dev did not allow the people to touch his feet for fear of a possible stampede.

⁶⁵⁸ More details in 3.7.3.

⁶⁵⁹ This water is treated in the same as the holy water of Ganges is treated. It is given especially at the death bed or when someone is in serious sickness etc. One boy of around 8 years old fell down from the roof top and he was taken to hospital, but he refused to take the medicine from the hospital and requested for the holy water from the *āśram*. He got cured and the people attributed the cure to the power of the holy water. The parents were happy, invited their friends and neighbours and some other devotees (the present researcher was also invited to the meal and prayer), and gave them a meal in happiness.

of stomach illness, and for distributing it to anyone who is ill. It is also given to livestock if they are sick, and sprinkled on the crop if it is unhealthy or has any diseases. The holy oil is treated similarly as sacred massage oil against all sorts of pain and aches. It is also used as a sacred object for conversion or change of mind. For example, if the husband is not a devotee and against the wife's faith in Christ, the woman gives the blessed oil and holy water to the husband without his knowledge in order to make him a devotee. The devotees believe in the power of holy water and blessed oil and use them as a shield against witchcraft and other black magic. They believe that they will be kept safe from ill effects by consuming or using this oil or water.

The *prasād* is distributed to the devotees after every weekly prayer meeting in the villages and on the second Saturday *satsaṅg* in the *āśram*. The *prasād* distributed at the villages after the prayer meeting is mostly the sweetened pearl tapioca (or any edible item), while in the *āśram* it is a bun (round-bread). It is blessed by the priest in the *āśram* and distributed by the *aguās* and members of the *sēva dal*. The distribution takes place towards the end of the prayer meeting. The *prasād* at the village prayer meetings is also blessed by a priest if he is present. If not, it is kept in front of the picture of Jesus at the time of prayer and then distributed. The *prasād* can be consumed or taken home to be shared with family and friends. In most cases, it is taken home to be shared.

4.1.11. The Bible, Holy Pictures, Pious Articles, and the Magazine *Prabhu ne Kaha*

The Bible is sacred for the *Khrisht Bhaktas*, and most, even the illiterate, keep the Bible at home. Some keep it in a sacred place, some cover it with cloths of saffron colour, and some read it in the evening at the time of family prayer.

Most devotees have several holy pictures displayed at home. They normally keep the pictures of the Sacred Heart, Mother Mary, and the Cross. They also keep other pious articles such as a Cross, rosary, medals, etc. at home in a prominent place. An oil lamp is lit and an *ārītī* is performed in front of these pictures daily in the morning and evening⁶⁶⁰. Normally, the devotees wear the cross or rosary. They also have the prayer book and hymnbook published by the *āśram*. Some people have the cassettes and cds with the talks by Anil Dev and *bhajans* or hymns at home⁶⁶¹. These pious articles are displayed in the home in a prominent place.

The bi-monthly magazine called *Prabhu ne Kahā* also has good circulation among the devotees. This magazine publishes talks and articles by Anil Dev, biblical stories and pious articles by other priests or nuns associated with the movement. It also publishes incidents, miracles, and witnesses of the cures and

660 Many Hindus have the custom of a prayer room (*pūjā room*) and these devotees changed it into a prayer room for Jesus.

661 Every Sunday and second Saturdays some vendors come with pious articles and make a good sale.

miracles with the photo of the cured person, etc. Around 1500 copies are sold to devotees directly in the *āśram* and around 3000 are sent by post.

4.1.12. Fasting and Penance

Several devotees fast regularly once every week. The women prefer to fast on all Fridays⁶⁶². Some people eat fruit and drink milk while fasting, some keep a strict fast drinking only water, and some fast during the day and eat after sunset. Many men do not shave their beards for the duration of Lent and women keep the fast very strictly. The fast is broken normally after the family prayer. In all the cases, the devotees do not eat anything made out of cereals or any item made out of rice and wheat⁶⁶³. As we have already seen, almost all the devotees fast on the Fridays of Lent, and fast completely on Good Friday even doing away with water.

Some devotees, like Uma Devi, keep forty-days of fast even outside of Lent as a weapon against evil spirits and sickness⁶⁶⁴. Some people fast on Saturdays and people like Meena keep a strict silence until she reaches *āśram* in the morning⁶⁶⁵. Silence in India is considered as a trademark of holiness and a sign of a higher spiritual state⁶⁶⁶. Many people walk, some for hours, to the *āśram* as a form of penance, sacrifice, or pilgrimage. Once the *satsaṅg* is over, they have to stay back in the *āśram* for the night, as they may not be able to reach home the same day.

4.1.13. Shaving off the Hair

Some devotees come to the *āśram* to shave off their hair as part of their devotion. Mostly, the hair of the children is shaved off and offered at the *āśram*. A child is brought to the priest at the *āśram* where he offers the child to Christ and offers prayers for the child. Finally, he cuts off some hair and places it in an envelope and deposits it in the box in front of the Blessed Sacrament exposed for perpetual adoration. The people who engage in intercession continue to make special prayers for the child whose hair is offered⁶⁶⁷. On Monday or Tuesday, the child's head is completely shaved off by the barber in the *āśram* premises. This is usually done when the mother (or the family) of the child (before he/she is born) takes a vow to give the hair to the Lord for several reasons. Some promise to give the

662 The Hindu women keep fast on all Tuesday for their husbands.

663 Wheat and rice are the main food of the people. So by not consuming those things, they remain in fast even while fruit or milk is consumed.

664 Uma Devi advises the devotees to take up fast for 40 days in order to get rid of all kinds of sickness and problems. She tells them that Jesus has told that only by fasting can one overcome the evil powers.

665 Keeping silence is considered as a pious and a holy act in India. Meena keeps silence until she bows at temple.

666 The sages in India are also called as *munis*, and people visit those sages although the sage would not utter a word to the visitors.

667 It is called giving hair to the Lord. The same practice is seen at Ganges or in many holy places of Hindus and some Christian centres like Velankanni.

hair if the child is male, some if the child is healthy, some for devotion's sake, some if the childbirth is normal and safe, etc.

4.1.14. Mannat

There are a number of *mannat* (vows) offered to the Lord by the devotees. They can take any form and any number. People offer a vow to the Lord for their needs and once their need is met, they come to the *āśram* to complete the vow. Some people vow to bow their head or prostrate (*māthā tēkna*), for example, four times at five places in the *āśram*⁶⁶⁸. They also vow to offer fruit, flowers, or sweets to the Lord/Mary in the *āśram*. Some vow to give witness in front of all once their intentions are met, some vow to walk to the *āśram* from their home, some take fasting as a vow, some give alms, etc⁶⁶⁹. Even shaving off hair is one of the forms of vow.

4.1.15. Perpetual Adorations and Intercessions

The *Āśram* started the perpetual adoration during the annual charismatic convention led by Thomas Paul and his team from November 10 to 12, 2000⁶⁷⁰. Fr. Anil Dev considers this perpetual adoration and intercession as the powerhouse of the *āśram*. Anyone who walks in is captivated by the adoration and prayer going on in the *āśram* and spends some time before the Blessed Sacrament. Sick people are brought to the adoration. Some people who pass on the road in front of the *āśram* make a short visit to the Blessed Sacrament on their way to and from the office/work.

The *āśram* conducts intercessory prayers. People who need special prayers write down their needs and place them in the box in the *darśan bhavan*. That prayer request is taken first to the *vardān* where members of the *āśram* intercede on their behalf and then to *darśan bhavan* for intercession. The very idea that the *āśram* staff is praying for their needs gives comfort to the people. People also request prayers through telephone, letters, and emails. We have also seen that a group of devotees spent time in adoration and intercession on every Sunday and second Saturday from 9.00 until 15.00.

4.1.16. Word of God

Preaching the Word of God is given great importance in the *āśram*. The preaching on Sundays and second Saturdays is mostly centred on one or a couple of words, or a sentence or few sentences, from the Bible. While preaching, the speaker makes the devotees repeat words and verses from the Bible. The repeti-

668 They prostrate or bow their heads at temple, grotto, *darśan bhavan*, *satsaṅg bhavan* and at *dhyān bhavan*.

669 Many of these practices are typically Hindu way of expressing faith and gratitude.

670 Matridham *āśram* Chronicle.

tions have allowed even the illiterate to memorize passages from the Bible. They, in turn, quote these words while praying at home and in the villages. The Word of God is given as the *gurumantrā* on the *Gurupūrṇimā*⁶⁷¹. At the time of every Eucharist, the celebrant priest reminds the devotees that they have received God in the form of the Word while the Christians have received the Lord in the form of bread. The members of the *āśram* maintain that they preach the Word of God and not conversion from one religion to another religion. They speak about the power of the Word of God. The devotees, in turn, believe in the power of the Word of God and try to live accordingly, trusting in them and using them while praying.

4.1.17. *Aguās and Counselling*

It is the *aguās* who directly deal with the people. Since they are from villages, the devotees feel much at home to approach them to make enquiries. New devotees contact one of them and the *aguās* explain the faith to the new devotees. Most of the *aguās* are those who have experienced some miracles or some experiences from their faith in Jesus⁶⁷². The *aguās* are the ones who guide the village prayer meetings. Those women, who are not allowed to go to the *āśram*, attend the village prayer where the *aguās* become their sole contact person and guide. The *aguās* also pray for the people in need, arrange and lead prayer meetings.

The *āśram* provides counselling to those who are in need. There will be one or two people in the *āśram* to listen to the devotees and talk to them⁶⁷³. The devotees who are troubled approach the members of the *āśram* directly or through the *aguās*.

4.2. The Spiritual Experiences of the *Khrist Bhaktas*

The devotees who come to the *āśram* experience something special. Many people come for the first time to fulfil their curiosity, since many people speak about it; some people come to get freedom from evil spirits, while others come to get cured from physical ailments, etc. But once they come, they are captured by the atmosphere, prayers, preaching, miracles, etc. There are cases of those who came only for the sake of curiosity but became a devotee the very first time and then an *aguā* not long after.

⁶⁷¹ See details in 3.7.3.

⁶⁷² Some *aguās* have now become interested in money and demand money from the devotees for praying for them. There are also some self-proclaimed *aguās*.

⁶⁷³ For more details, see details in 3.7.6.

4.2.1. Miracles, Cures, Witnesses, and Freedom from Evil Spirits

Many people suffer from various kinds of problems and illness and have either less means to go for medical treatment in time, the treatments have not given any result, or the problems of life are such that they do not see any solutions. Mostly people turn to witchcraft or sorcerers who are called *ojhās*. *Ojhās* collect money and materials like chicken, liquor, etc., and go on with their witchcraft while the suffering remains. There are also instances when medical treatment for longer periods has not given any cure. Hence, people are desperate for cures of their ailments. When they hear about the miraculous cures happening in the *āśram* they flock to it. People who are suffering are eager to get cured and as they take part in the prayers and healing services, they often get cured miraculously. They may come to the *āśram* just for the sake of physical cure. However, once they get cured, the experience of the cure encourages them to become *Khrīst Bhaktas*.

During the *satsaṅg*, a time is set apart for giving witness to the miracles and experiences of the devotees. The devotees come to the stage and express in front of everyone the miracle in their lives or the experience they had. Witnesses are given on every *satsaṅg* on Sundays, second Saturdays, at monthly retreats, and annual conventions, and some of the miracles are published in the magazine *Prabhu ne Kaha*. The witnesses of the people are also spread by word of mouth. The witnesses add impetus to the faith of those devotees who have similar sufferings. These witnesses encourage many others to hope for God's blessings in their lives too. People applaud the witness of others when they hear the miraculous cure or the work of Jesus in other's lives.

Another important aspect of their experience is the freedom they receive from the spell of evil spirits. There is widespread belief in the existence of evil spirits and the spirits of the dead roaming in the villages⁶⁷⁴. The spirits of dead people have to be appeased. People find evil spirits as the source for almost all calamities and sicknesses. In order to get rid of the spell of these spirits, or to appease them, they normally go to *ojhās*. When they realize that the *ojhās* cannot keep the evil spirits away forever or another evil spirit has come to disturb them, or their enemy has set an evil spirit against them, they come to the *āśram* to get rid of their sufferings and the attacks of evil spirits. The story of Jesus who cures the people from satanic forces and all kinds of physical illness is very appealing to these people. When they see the miracles and hear the witness of the people who have received cures and miracles, their faith increases and many of them feel freed from the spell of evil spirits and experience cure from physical illness.

Another experience of the *Bhaktas* is the experience of God as a friend and a benefactor and not as someone to be feared. When people become *Bhaktas*, they

⁶⁷⁴ They have to appease these spirits in several ways, e.g., if there is a premature death of a person it is serious. Such spirits require more from the relatives. For example, the premature death of a *brahman* woman is so severe that sometimes a temple is constructed for her spirit.

take the house deity or the icon of the house deity to the *āśram*. They leave the deity in the *āśram* “to be buried under the foot of the cross” so that it can do no damage to the family. Many times the family members are afraid of taking the deity themselves and ask the staff of the *āśram* to take it away. The deity was seen as something to be feared. They are taught that Jesus is the saviour whom they need not fear but can love. They are also taught that God is love and that God does not need to be propitiated. Thus, they learn to love God and to live in freedom.

4.2.2. Expressive Prayer: Communitarian and Charismatic

For the *Khrist Bhaktas*, expressive prayer and community-prayer is something new. In Hinduism, prayers are mostly offered silently by individuals. Even when there is a gathering in the temple, each person approaches the deity individually. In the *āśram* the *Khrist Bhaktas* are taught to pray loudly as one family and to pray for one another. Unlike the Hindu temple where the *pūjā* is offered for each individual, there is only one liturgy, one adoration, and one healing prayer, etc. for all the devotees.

The charismatic form of prayers said aloud and in community are new experiences for them. It seems that the charismatic method of prayer and preaching of the Word of God leads them into a different level of spiritual freedom and inner healing. They seem to experience the power of the Spirit during the *satsaṅgs*. The people who are afflicted by poverty, social oppression, and physical and psychological problems find solace in these prayer meetings. The physical and psychological healing that is happening during prayer adds to their devotion and faith. They are also freed from various superstitions and bondages, which lead to peace in their personal and family lives⁶⁷⁵.

The experience of the Lenten observance, the Way of the Cross, the passion narratives enacted, etc., are a source of spiritual nourishment for the *Bhaktas*. The *Bhaktas* participate in these celebrations with earnestness and enthusiasm. It seems that in the Way of the Cross or, rather, in the cross of Christ, the *Bhaktas* identify their sufferings and pain. As Anil Dev says, “probably the suffering and Cross of Jesus give more meaning to the suffering they have in their daily living”⁶⁷⁶. It probably gives them the strength to face the harsh life in the villages. The Lenten observance of keeping fast for 40 days, the participation in the Way of the Cross, and the earnestness to touch the cross at the end of services show their spiritual enthusiasm.

Some *Bhaktas* receive visions of Jesus, Mary, etc. Some of them have frequent visions, while some have them only occasionally. Meena, who receives frequent visions, tells that Mary feeds her quite often and then she feels no more

⁶⁷⁵ We have earlier seen how they experience freedom from evils sprits, etc.

⁶⁷⁶ A. DEV, ‘*Khrist Bhakta* Movement. Its Origin and Dynamics’, in *Jeevadharma* 38, 2008, 227, p. 436.

hunger. Other devotees approach these visionaries with requests for prayer as the devotees think that the prayer of the visionaries have more effect.

4.3. Personal Life and Social Relations of the *Khrist Bhaktas*

4.3.1. Change of Character

One of the important changes to be noticed is the change of character in the lives of the *Khrist Bhaktas*. Many men, who are addicted to alcohol, smoking and chewing tobacco or snuff locally known as *gutkha*⁶⁷⁷, leave these habits. Drinking alcohol is considered one of the worst family and social banes in India. A good number of the men in the villages are addicted to alcohol. Consequently, they are violent towards their wives, often regularly beating them up and spoiling the peaceful atmosphere of families, causing fights between families, and spending most of the income on alcohol. Another habit of men besides chewing *gutkha* in many Indian villages is the smoking of *bīṛī*, an Indian thin cigarette filled with tobacco flakes and wrapped in *tendu* leaf. These habits are not only harmful to them and society but also eat into their already small income and make the families poorer. Because of their becoming *Bhaktas*, they leave these habits and the family and the village experiences a lot more peace.

In the villages, often there are petty fights and quarrels between neighbours, especially over land border areas. Mostly, these disputes go on for years without an end. At other times, they go to the civil court and the court proceedings take many years while the families remain in dispute⁶⁷⁸. There are also intra-family disputes, i.e., between brother and brother, daughter-in-law and mother-in-law and so on. Once they become *Bhaktas* and attend the monthly retreats, they are taught about the importance of forgiveness in their lives. Such retreats teach them about the values of family life, healthy relationship between husband and wife, responsible parenthood, etc.

In the Hindu religion, there is less stress on forgiveness while the *Khrist Bhaktas* are instructed about its importance. *Bhaktas* learn to forgive one another and experience peace and harmony in their lives. During the prayer sessions, they are asked to forgive and pray for their enemies following the example of Jesus. There are many instances where *Bhaktas* have decided to end their mutual fights, land disputes, etc. Many *Bhaktas* who come to the *āśram*, after listening to the Word of God preached to them, are able to forgive one another and able to enter into a new relationship.

⁶⁷⁷ The Oxford dictionary translates it as *gurākū*.

⁶⁷⁸ For example, the land border case in the family of Chandan. The neighbour had not allowed them to construct a wall around their farm for 20 years and once the neighbour became a devotee, he himself came to Chandan's home and said that they can now build the wall.

4.3.2. Overcoming Caste and Varṇ Barriers

Hindu society is marked by the independent self-sufficient unit called *varṇ*, generally termed as caste (the Hindi word *jāt*), each with a definite unalterable social status deriving its section from religion⁶⁷⁹. Although the society is divided into four major *varṇas*, it becomes more complex considering the number of castes and sub-castes within it. There is no social mobility within the caste system. “In India the various caste communities exist, or co-exist, in watertight compartments, each governed by its own leaders”⁶⁸⁰. People belonging to different castes tend to avoid intermarriage, sharing of food and drinks, or any close social interaction with the members of other castes. The caste or *varṇ* distinction is very strong in the Indian villages.

People who are divided by several castes and sub-castes stand united in the *Khrīst Bhakta* movement. Anil Dev thinks that the barriers of caste that kept them away from one another is being removed in this movement⁶⁸¹. When they come to the *āśram* the so-called untouchables and the high castes stand shoulder to shoulder. There are instances where the low caste women are the *aguās* who lead the prayer in the villages and all come under their leadership to attend the prayer. Or when a low caste *aguā* distributes the *prasād* in the *āśram* on second Saturdays during *satsaṅg*, *Bhaktas* from all castes accept it as holy⁶⁸². They are able to experience, to a limited extent, some kind of fellowship and communion with one another. With a changed attitude towards life and the world, these people otherwise divided by caste barriers and social taboos, relate and communicate with one another⁶⁸³. However, it has to be noted that no inter-caste marriage among the *Bhaktas* has happened. Therefore, the *varṇ* distinction is still very much alive. The other things mostly happen in the atmosphere of the *āśram*, since in the presence of the holy, many divisions become gray.

4.3.3. Social Commitment

The law of *karm* (also called as *karma*) guides Hindu society. It determines the individual's lot, condition, status, position, and caste in society. There is no scope for freedom in the operation of the law of *karm*⁶⁸⁴. It explains the poverty, suffering, and inequalities in society. According to this theory, one's present status is the fruit of his actions in the previous life. In addition, depending on one's conduct in this life, one can achieve a better life in the next. Each person is thus responsible for his/her present/future status. Therefore, one has to be content

679 P. THOMAS, *Hindu Religions, Customs and Manners*, Bombay, D.B. Teraporevala Sons & Co. Private Ltd, 1956, p. 12. We have given a short description of the four *varṇas* in our earlier section 3.4.2.

680 S.M. MICHAEL, *The Cultural Context of Evangelization in India*, Pune/Indore, Isvani/Satprakashan, 1980, p. 113.

681 DEV, ‘*Khrīst Bhakta* Movement’, p. 438.

682 The high castes in North Indian villages do not accept any food from the so-called untouchables.

683 DEV, ‘*Khrīst Bhakta* Movement’, p. 438.

684 T. DABRE, ‘Christian Influence in the Transformation of Indian Society’, in *Vidyajyoti* 67, 2003, 1, p. 13.

with the present status and strive to improve his future life. Consequently, we do not see much social commitment in Hinduism.

Once they become *Bhaktas* of Christ, however, they are taught to live the value of charity. They express their social commitment by keeping one handful of rice from what is taken for cooking and keeping it apart to be given to the poorest among them. Such rice is collected mostly at the time of Lent and is given to the *musahars*⁶⁸⁵ and other totally poor people. They are also taught that Christ is able to give them salvation from the law of *karm*.

4.4.The Cultural World of the *Khrist Bhaktas*

Religion and culture in India are interwoven into one reality to such a degree that it is difficult to distinguish between the two⁶⁸⁶. Therefore, many religious and cultural practices are intertwined. Any change in the religious domain affects at least some kind of change in the cultural domains. The festivals and rites of passage give us a glimpse of this composition or mixture.

4.4.1. The Festivals

The festivals are good occasions to observe the attitude of the *Bhaktas* towards culture and their understanding of Christianity and Hinduism. The most important festivals in the area are *holī*, *dīpāvalī* (*dīvālī*), *rakṣābandhan*, *daśahrā*, *janmāṣṭamī*, and *mahāśivrātri*. There are several other small and big feasts and festivals celebrated in this part of North India. Besides these, every village has its own village god/goddess whose festival is arranged in the village once a year in honour of the deity. Most of these festivals have fasting, *puja*, and one or the other kind of sweets made and are celebrated with dances, processions, etc. The first three festivals, namely, *holī*, *dīpāvalī*, and *rakṣābandhan* have rather wider and cultural and less religious implications than the others. Therefore, we focus on these festivals.

Holī, the feast of colours, is very popular in the rural areas of North India. It is a feast of freedom from social norms. People celebrate this feast by throwing coloured powder and coloured water on each other without the distinction of any caste/*varṇ* barrier. While the younger generation enjoys it by drenching each other in coloured water or paint, the grown-ups limit their celebration to applying *tilak* - a mark on the forehead of each other⁶⁸⁷. Mostly, the women apply *tilak* to the other women and men to the other men. Several cultural parties are organized with singing of *holī* songs and dancing to the tunes of drums. It is a spring festi-

685 Sometimes called *mūṣahar*.

686 See the details about this general impression in India in our earlier section 2.1.2.1.

687 C.J. FULLER, *The Camphor Flame. Popular Hinduism and Society in India*, 2nd ed., New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 2004, p. 131.

val and has several legends attached to it⁶⁸⁸. The sprinkling of the colour is allowed until noon and in the evening the people come out in new clothes to join the rest of the celebrations, usually dance, drama, etc. arranged in the village.

The celebration of *dīpāvali*, popularly known as the Feast of Lights, has some specialities in this part of the country. People from all *varṇas* celebrate it. Though the festival lasts for five days, here it is celebrated normally for three days. On the first day, the *dīyā* or the earthen oil lamp is lit at the place (outside the home) where ashes from the cooking are collected. The *Dīyā* on the second day is lit on money and rice, and on the third day (the *dīpāvali* day) it is lit all over the house. New clothes are worn on that day; *pūjā* is offered to Lakṣmī (the goddess of wealth) and Gaṇeś (the god of good beginnings and remover of obstacles), many fireworks are set off, and sweets distributed. It is a family festival and the family gathers for the celebration. The feast is suspended in a family if someone dies on the feast until a child is born in that family on the same feast.

Another festival celebrated all over the North India is *rakṣābandhan*, the feast that celebrates the brother-sister relationship. On this feast, every sister ties *rākhī*, a sacred thread, on the wrist of her brothers. She first makes him sit, applies the *tilak* (a mark on the forehead with *kuṅkum* or turmeric powder), performs *ārtī*, offers him sweets, and then ties the *rākhī* on his hand. He, in turn, gives her presents, promises to protect her, and takes her blessings. The day has no special *pūjā* but special delicacies are made and new clothes are worn.

Let us examine how the *Khrist Bhaktas* celebrate these feasts. Of course, there are variations in the degree of participation among the *Bhaktas*. Those devotees who come to the *āśram* only occasionally take part in the festivals just as they used to do before becoming *Bhaktas*. Nothing has changed for them concerning their mode of festival celebrations. The majority of those *Bhaktas* who frequent the *āśram* regularly join the village community in festivals such as *dīpāvali*, *holī*, etc, but do not perform the *pūjā* to the Hindu gods any longer. Some *Bhaktas* join the village community in the outward part of the celebrations, but they offer *pūjā* to Christ or light *diya* in front of the picture of Christ. Most of them follow the general custom of keeping the lamps lit around the house for *dīpāvali* and join the *holī* celebrations by applying the *tilak* on the forehead of the relatives and others in the village. Some of them join the village in the celebrations unwillingly or half-heartedly since not all the members of the family and relatives are *Bhaktas* of Christ. These *Bhaktas* buy new clothes for their children at the festivals and some of them continue to make delicacies. Others join the celebration, but they themselves do not make anything to celebrate.

There are other *Bhaktas*, especially the ones who are more committed to Christ, who have completely stopped joining the festivals. Most of the *aguās*, like Urmila Patel, Asharam Bhuria, Meena, and many others, said that they do not participate in any of these celebrations. They now light up their homes not at

688 See for the details of the feast and legends, THOMAS, *Hindu Religions, Customs and Manners*, pp. 140-149.

dīpāvali but at Christmas. They also buy new clothes not at *dīpāvali* but at Christmas. The neighbours bring them the *prasād* from the Hindu temple, but the more devoted do not accept the *prasād*. In some cases, the neighbours have now stopped bringing the *prasād*. Nevertheless, even the more committed *aguās* allow their children to participate in the festivals and join the other village children.

However, most *Bhaktas* continue to celebrate the feast of *rakṣābandhan* in the same way as the village community. The *Bhaktas* also join the village for other celebrations such as those related to rites of passage. They also invite the neighbours and are invited by the neighbours to the weddings and other normal rites of passage celebrations.

4.4.2. The Rites of Passage

Although the ancient Hindu lawgivers mentioned 12 principal ceremonies for a male child, only some orthodox castes in certain provinces perform all these ceremonies⁶⁸⁹. According to some traditions, there are ten sacraments, while according to some others, there are 16, but only four are popularly practiced. They are the *jāt karm* (birth ceremonies), *upānayan* (the sacred-thread ceremony), *vivāh* (marriage), and *antyēṣṭi* (funeral rites).

The practice of the birth ceremonies in the villages of this area is varied. Normally, a newborn child and the mother are isolated and restricted in one room. The mother is allowed to come out only after *bārhi* (12 days). At *bārhi* the child and mother are bathed, a *paṇḍit* is invited who comes for the naming of the child. If the family is rich then a meal is given to the whole village; if not, sweets are distributed to all. Although belonging to the birth ceremony, *muṇḍan* (shaving the hair off) or the first hair cut of the male child is not practiced by most people. Still, many people make some kind of remembrance on the day of *muṇḍan* though not as a celebration. It is usually practiced when the family has a child several years after marriage. Similarly, the *upānayan*, the sacred thread ceremony, which is limited to the male child of the people belonging to the three higher *varṇas*, are not celebrated often in the villages.

The marriage ceremony is an elaborate one and the ways of performing them are varied in details in different *varṇas* and areas. Normally, the proposal comes from the family of the girl and they come to see the boy. If they like the boy, a small amount of money (not a dowry) is given as a symbol of acceptance. Then the boy's family goes to see the girl and if they like her, they also offer money (not a dowry). This is followed by a *tilak* ceremony when the boy's party comes and discusses the dowry, etc. The marriage ceremony conducted at the girl's home, led by the *paṇḍit*, lasts for two to three hours. Then the newly married couple goes to the boy's home and the following day they go to the temple for blessings.

689 THOMAS, *Hindu Religions, Customs and Manners*, p. 87.

At the death of a person, the Hindus place the body of the dead on the floor. The dead body is covered in a long white cloth called *kafan*. The dead body is immediately taken to the Ganges to be burned on the banks. Only the male friends and members of the family of the deceased accompany the dead body to the Ganges. The eldest son performs the last rites at the site, shaves off his hair, and wears white cloths for 13 days. In most cases, after 10 days the other male members and, in certain cases, even the neighbours, shave off their hair and on the 13th day a meal is given to all the people in the village after a *pūjā* is offered by the *paṇḍit*.

Let us observe how the *Bhaktas* perform these rites of passage. Most of the *Bhaktas* follow the normal practice of the other Hindu brethren. The ceremonies following the birth of the child are the same, while some devotees bring the child to the *āśram* for shaving off the child's hair and for offering the hair at the *āśram*. It is also common for them to bring the child to the *āśram* on Sunday or second Saturday to receive the blessings.

For marriage, the devotees follow the normal Hindu practice. Normally, the officiating of the marriage rite is done by the Hindu *paṇḍit*. Some *Bhaktas*, especially the more devoted, want the priest of the *āśram* to lead the rite of the marriage, but since this is not yet acceptable to the other relatives or whole village, it is still conducted by the *paṇḍit*. If both the bride and bridegroom are *Bhaktas*, then a priest from the *āśram* goes to the village and blesses the couple, but if one of them is not a devotee, then the couple comes to the *āśram* after the marriage for the blessing.

The *Bhaktas* follow the normal Hindu practice for the last rite. However, there are discussions going on about their desire to be buried according to the Christian practice. One of the woman devotees (Rajeshwaree) who came to the *āśram* daily for some years, finally accepted baptism and became a Christian. She continued to live as an earnest practicing Christian. She wanted to die in the *āśram*⁶⁹⁰ and she died on a Sunday while attending the Eucharist there. Although other *Bhaktas* and her devotee relatives wanted to bury the dead body in the church cemetery as is the Christian practice in India, her non-devotee relatives forcefully took her body to the Ganges and burned the body according to the Hindu custom. There was also another case where the Hindu relatives wanted the body to be burned at the Ganges while the *Khrist Bhaktas* wanted to bury it according to the Christian practice in India.

690 She had told her intention or, rather, her final wish to many people including the present researcher.

4.4.3. *The Self Perception of the Khrist Bhaktas*

What do the *Bhaktas* think of themselves concerning their religious affiliation? Do they consider themselves as Christians? Alternatively, do they reckon themselves to be Hindus? Or do they possess yet another identity?

We have noticed that there is no initiation ceremony for a new person wanting to be a *Khrist Bhakta*. What emerges from our observations and interviews is a mosaic picture. The majority of *Bhaktas* consider themselves both as Hindus and *Bhaktas* of Christ at the same time. They continue to live as Hindus and follow the social customs expected of them. They celebrate the festivals, follow the rites of passage, and live in harmony with their Hindu brethren. The only change is that they do not go to a temple but frequent the *āśram*. They are not happy if someone calls them Christians, and try to react to the comments. Some *Bhaktas* follow the Hindu practices but at the same time hate the Hindu religious practices and gods. They consider the Hindu gods and goddesses as mere lifeless images and stones. They do not want to be baptised, but frequent the *āśram* regularly. They are not averse to being called Christians, but mostly they address themselves as Hindus. Then there is a minority who finds happiness in addressing themselves as Christians. Although they are not baptised, they speak about their intention of being baptised. They are happy to hear people calling them Christians.

4.5. An Assessment of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats to the Movement

Now we shall assess the *Khrist Bhakta* movement from a broadened inculturation perspective, especially in the area of community building. This will give us a comprehensive view of the movement. We shall discover its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

4.5.1. *Strengths of the Movement*

First, let us examine the important strengths of this movement. The most important asset seems to be the acceptance of the movement by the people at large. From what has been described earlier, it is clear that the number of people joining the *Khrist Bhakta* movement has increased enormously in a very short span of time. The movement has grown from “some people” (initially 7 to 10 and later 15 to 20) in 1993-94 who attended the *satsaṅgs* to 4000 to 5000 on a usual Sunday in 2007. During the same period, the total strength of the movement grew from a few people to 30,000 to 40,000 and presently it has grown up to 50,000 to 60,000 people. This is a pointer to its acceptance by the people⁶⁹¹. The fact that

⁶⁹¹ We are aware of the several reasons why people join a new religious movement. We do not go into the details of all the socio-political and religio-psychological reasons of why people join this movement. For

it has outnumbered the Catholic population of several dioceses in the area proves the reception of this movement by the public, although the number does not guarantee the quality of the commitment. Chauvet shows that to live faith, a community and traditions is necessary⁶⁹². This growing number of people and the formation of *Khrist Bhaktas* as a growing community is a strong basis, or at least some basis, for living the faith.

Likewise, this movement's expansion is from below and not from above. What we mean here is that it spreads and radiates from and by the ordinary people by word of mouth. Although there is a guru, and there are *aguās*, the stress and focus is neither on the guru nor on *aguās* or any other leader. The *Bhaktas* take initiative not only in spreading but also in assimilating. They are appropriating the faith into their cultural matrix, as they understand it. This has to be compared to the earlier efforts from above where the missionaries tried to accept elements from the culture into their liturgy, dress, architecture, etc., in order to present Christianity in an Indian crucible. We have seen that the earlier efforts by the Catholic Bishops' Conference, as well as the efforts through the several *āśrams* dispersed all over India, were initiated and accepted only by some elites. The inculturation practiced by the *Khrist Bhaktas* has more focus on a bottom up expansion that is fluid on the micro level. This is an example of what we can call the appropriation of faith from below⁶⁹³.

Another important strength of the movement is the fact of keeping the *Bhaktas* as *Bhaktas* and not converting them into Christianity. Conversion is seen not as a conversion to God but as a change from one community to another in India. Even in terms of civil law, by conversion, one person moves from falling under from Hindu Personal law to falling under Christian Personal law. Thus, conversion has social and legal implications. The *Bhaktas* who come to the movement for the first time do not feel the pressure of losing their religious and cultural affiliation just by going to the *āśram* or taking part in the *satsaṅg*. They are not forced to leave their culture, names, food habits, and clothing styles, etc. They express their faith in Christ from within the Hindu cultural background. "People will be more willing to join a religious group to the degree that doing so minimizes their expenditure of cultural capital"⁶⁹⁴. The dream of several Indians who wanted to accept Christ and not to become Westernised seems to become fulfilled in this movement⁶⁹⁵.

details about such reasons for people to join a new movement, see M.T. SINGER, 'The Process of Brainwashing, Psychological Coercion and Thought Reform', in L.L. DAWSON (ed.), *Cults and New Religious Movements. A Reader*, Malden/Oxford, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003, pp. 147-159.

692 CHAUVET, *Symbol and Sacrament*, p. 376.

693 At the same time the leadership is not fully from below. The *āśram* appoints or rather recognizes someone as *aguā*. This discernment of leadership is based on the charismatic elements. So we have a mixture or a successful interplay of both.

694 R. STARK, 'Why Religious Movements Succeed or Fail. A Revised General Model, in L.L. DAWSON (ed.), *Cults and New Religious Movements. A Reader*, Malden/Oxford, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003, p. 261.

695 Remember our earlier discussions (chapter 2) about the dream and visions of Indian theologians and thinkers who showed that there is nothing in authentic Christianity that would demand the one who accepts faith in Christ should abandon his original socio-cultural group and join another.

The *āśram*, being the centre of the *Khrīst Bhakta* movement, has come under scrutiny from the Hindu fundamentalists. There were allegations of conversion in the *āśram*, but the fact that the *āśram* did not convert even a single person proved the adversaries wrong. There were also incidents, especially in the early days, when some Hindu fundamentalists tried to stop the villagers from going to the *āśram*, threatening them by blocking their roads, but the people found different ways of reaching the *āśram*. Now, seeing the presence of larger crowds, and the fact that the *āśram* does not convert anyone or preach conversion, such elements have stopped their efforts. Remember our earlier section about the negative attitude towards Christianity. At the same time, the *āśram* upholds the right to preach the Word of God and spreads the message of Christ. Christ is preached but baptism is not advocated. This has stopped the anti-Christian propaganda while allowing the preaching of the Gospel.

Another important strength of the movement is the multi-caste/*varṇ* composition of the community of the *Khrīst Bhaktas*. They come from all the sections of society – a new communion is formed in the name of Christ and not based on birth into any *varṇ*. Indian Christianity, especially in the northern part of India, was mostly comprised of *dalits* or the lower sections of society, but in this movement people from all walks of life and all caste groups take part. *Dalits* are only one of the sections.

This new community formation is to be considered in the context of the division of the Indian society. One of the basic factors of Indian society is its division into four major *varṇas* and again its subdivision into several castes and sub-castes. “There are 13,156 clans, 12,057 surnames, 8,650 *gotras*, 1,963 lineages, 2,994 titles, 7,755 subgroups and 7,452 surnames”⁶⁹⁶. Not only is it divided but also it segregates people on the basis of their birth. The caste division implies that the community is divided into units that are categorised as “high” and “low” or “pure” and “impure”. People are ranked into groups based on heredity within a rigid system of social stratification. Once born into a caste, one has to remain in the same caste. The units regulate marriage, sex, and kinship. Marriage outside the *varṇ* is strictly prohibited. When strictly observed, even the touch or just a contact with a person of a lower caste can negatively alter one's purity and require, in some cases, a ritual purification⁶⁹⁷. If someone commits a serious defiling act, the result will be expulsion from the caste⁶⁹⁸. Therefore, there is an obsessive or persistent fear on the part of many high caste Hindus of being polluted from the touch of the lower castes and so they observe all possible kinds of segregation.

696 K.N. SINGH, *India's Communities. People of India National Series 5*, New Delhi, Anthropological Survey of India /Oxford University Press, 1998, p. xvi.

697 In certain cases they take shower or change clothes in the event of such contacts.

698 Once expelled from caste, the person is considered as an outcaste and no communion with such people is practiced.

This segregation is observed very clearly in the sharing of food⁶⁹⁹. There are several rules concerning food practices in India. It is as important to see what a Hindu will not eat as to what he will, with whom he will not share his food as much as with whom he will, because food restrictions and the sharing of food are highly developed and indicate caste or sect affiliation⁷⁰⁰. “Complex rules of commensality specify the castes from which a particular caste may accept different kinds of food”⁷⁰¹. The cooking itself is the starting point of purity. The very process of cooking is seen as the beginning of ingestion, and therefore cooking is susceptible to pollution in the same way as eating⁷⁰². So higher caste persons will not accept food from the hands of lower caste persons or prepared by them⁷⁰³.

In the context of caste hierarchy, pollution, and segregation, the contribution of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement in the building of communities is a principal strength. It is obvious that the people of several castes come into contact with each other in the *āśram*. In the huge gatherings on a normal Sunday or a second Saturday, they mingle with each other in a mixture of all the castes. They sit together on the same platform, pray and sing together in one voice. They collect the water for blessings from the same pond. They all go to the *mandir* whenever one feels and remains there as long as each one wants. All of them visit the *mariyala* and *mandir* by the same road and venerate the holy statutes together. Once the hall is full, the late comers squeeze in, not looking at the caste of the neighbours, but searching only for empty spaces to sit. There is no separate seating arrangement for any castes and no special arrangement for any caste groups or preference for anyone⁷⁰⁴. It is true that these things are happening in the holy atmosphere of the *āśram*, similar to what happens at the time of a temple feast. However, the *aguās*, who lead the prayer meeting in the villages and distribute the *prasād* in the *āśram*, hail from different caste groups that do not happen in the Hindu temple. Eating or sharing the same food (at the three-day retreats) is itself a big leap in Hindu culture in breaking the barrier between the *varṇas*. However,

699 Interestingly, there is an often quoted Sanskrit saying, *Annam parabrahma swarōpam* (Food personifies Brahma the Creator) which gives the religious meaning of food. But in practical terms this food becomes the source of pollution once it comes into contact with the people of lower castes.

700 S.M. MICHAEL, ‘Analysis of the Society at the Macro Level. The Indian Rural Reality’, in D.S. AMALORPAVADASS (ed.), *The Indian Church in the Struggle for a New Society*, Bangalore, NBCLC, 1981, p. 126.

701 *Ibid.* p. 127.

702 M. DOUGLAS, *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966, p. 157.

703 Vegetarianism is a symbol of purity. The higher the caste, the purer it was considered to be. A Brahmin had to protect his purity at all times and would not eat meat. The taboos surrounding cooking and eating were so strict that until a few decades ago, going to restaurants or eating out was uncommon or unthinkable for most Hindu families, especially the vegetarian ones. Indian restaurants catering to strictly non-meat eating clients routinely announce that “pure vegetarian” food is served. The concept of purity is in fact so synonymous with vegetarianism that Indians who do not eat meat will often proudly state, “I am a pure vegetarian”. Vegetarianism is in general accepted as the pure food. Only *Śūdrās* of the very lowest class eat meat openly. Even the common *Śūdrās* do not offer meat at their festive gatherings such as wedding feasts.

704 It is more like a crowd. A mixture of all: old and young, women and men, educated and illiterate, urban and rural.

it has to be noted that the food is given from the *āśram* and therefore the Hindus could consider it as holy and no longer polluting even if shared with lower caste members. In spite of all this, we can observe that the *Khrish Bhaktas* seem to experience a new kind of fellowship and communion with one another. The *Bhaktas* are able to enter into a new form of community although not fully formed and ideal. As Anil Dev observes, with a changed attitude towards life and the world, these people, otherwise divided by *varṇ* barriers and social taboos, are at least able to relate and communicate with one another⁷⁰⁵. This also answers those critics who attack similar movements for a lack of social sensitivity.

The *Bhaktas*' practice of sharing food grains is another strength of this movement. It is a sign of social commitment, on the one hand, and a contribution to the formation of new communion on the other hand. Social concern is not a constituent element of Hindu religious commitment. The *Bhaktas* express this communion and commitment by keeping apart one handful of rice from what is taken for their cooking to be given to the poorest among them.

Another important strength is the presence of charismatic elements. *Bhaktas* feel or experience in their lives, and in the lives of several others, miracles, cures, and other faith-healings. Such experiences sustain their faith and bring more people to the movement. Every year, especially at the annual charismatic convention, people in large numbers become *Bhaktas*. They feel involved in the prayer and experience God's intervention in their lives. The charismatic elements of expressive prayer, the intercessions, the healing prayer, the preaching of the Word, coupled with the teaching of Jesus, attract people and so the movement increases day-by-day. The initial enthusiasm, which the charismatic form of Christianity gives, may be lost for some people while others may grow into higher levels of spirituality.

Another positive aspect of the movement is the change of behaviour that takes place in the movement. Because of their faith in the movement and their association with the *āśram*, many *Bhaktas* abandon their addiction to alcohol, tobacco, etc. We had seen earlier how these habits have ruined many families. This movement also brings and establishes peace within families and between families. The preaching in the retreats on family, love, forgiveness, and other Christian values has made changes in the lives of *Bhaktas*. Such changes also help to reduce the criticism of this movement.

An additional strength is the lack of too many institutions, rules, etc. Hence, the movement has a lot of fluidity. There are no membership rules or registers, no mandatory rituals and activities, no final hard and fast rules for being a *Khrish Bhakta*. This allows sufficient freedom to remain a devotee or to leave the movement. This allows people to walk freely in and out of the movement without being concerned with breaking any rules. Thus, faith-matters are left to individual freedom and the individual's need.

705 DEV, 'Khrish Bhakta Movement', p. 438.

4.5.2. Weaknesses of the Movement

One of the major weaknesses of the movement is its fluidity. Since there are no initiation ceremonies, no rules or institutions to keep and sustain in the new communion, it can easily break up. Every new movement needs some kind of boundaries and rules to sustain it and to exclude potential free riders and doubters, although these rules must be sufficiently low not to drive away those who are willing to take the faith seriously⁷⁰⁶. We saw earlier how Omkar, after five years of intimate and close working with the Matridham *āśram* broke away and formed his own Church. Further breaking in a similar fashion is possible because of the movement's very fluid nature. The lack of an initiation ceremony encourages "shoppers" who come to the *āśram* and the movement for short term gain without a commitment to Christ.

Another weakness closely related to the above point is the phenomenon of many devotees leaving the movement. On the one hand, it is growing day-by-day, but on the other hand, many devotees are deserting it. Some came to gain miracles and cures, some came because everyone was coming, etc., but they leave the movement once they no longer require it or if their needs are not met at all. If the flow or abandonment is not checked, the movement could easily die out. History teaches us that not many movements succeed to generate enough energy to outlive the initial enthusiasm⁷⁰⁷. This movement also has the weakness of becoming a haven for short-term religious sojourners⁷⁰⁸.

The charismatic elements have their negative side and weaknesses as well. First, although many *Bhaktas* are attracted to the charismatic prayer and its experiences, as time goes by, they do not feel the same effects any longer and they do not experience any more faith-healing, etc., and so they find it no longer useful for them and leave the movement altogether. Second, the charismatic aspect can also encourage too much emotionalism and claims of direct revelation from God. Third, it can lead to the literal interpretation of the Bible. The majority of the *aguās* and the leaders in the village are not educated or trained enough to be experts in the Bible⁷⁰⁹. It is easier for them to treat the Bible literally and look in it for readymade answers for all problems. Such interpretations of the Bible can also lead to fundamentalism. Some *aguās* and leaders take the literal meaning of the Bible and use it against others. This kind of interpretation provides a kind of

706 STARK, 'Why Religious Movements Succeed or Fail', p. 263.

707 Rodney Stark shows that only one out of 1,000 new religious movements will attract 100,000 followers and last for as long as a century. *Ibid.* p. 259.

708 A study on new religious movements done by Frederic Bird and Bill Reimer reveals that many members are short-term members. They point out that the group called Family had 57,000 members but after 25 years their numbers came down to 3,000. See for details, F. BIRD & B. REIMER, 'Participation Rates in New Religious and Para Religious Movements', in *Journal for Scientific Study of Religion* 21, 1982, 1, pp. 1-10.

709 We are aware of the camps conducted for the *aguās*, but they are to be made more professional.

superiority complex for those who follow their interpretation while they look down upon others who do not follow their interpretation.

According to Ralph Stacy, an expert in management, any successful organization requires leaders to strongly share the same values and same vision of the future and work in harmony⁷¹⁰. There is an absence of clear vision about the future of the movement among the leaders who are involved in the movement. As we had seen, priests follow their own policy towards the *Khrist Bhaktas*. Although Anil Dev is the guru of the Matridham *āśram*, the diocese has two other *āśrams* as well as several parishes catering to the *Bhaktas*. The activities of these *āśrams* and parishes are not coordinated. The bishop of Varanasi is the head of the local church, but the *Bhaktas* are not Christians and so they are not under him. There is much fluidity in the leadership and guidance and its future course. It requires much co-operation and collaboration among the priests working in the parishes catering to *Khrist Bhaktas* and the three *āśrams*. The leaders have different and unique roles, each representing critical contributions to the collective action. This special situation shows the existence of a high degree of interdependence and independence among the leaders. This interdependence requires coordination and synchronization among members and integration of their contributions to achieve team goals⁷¹¹.

Additionally, the question of the second generation of leadership is also a weak point. Presently, Anil Dev is the guru, but a timely replacement and smooth transfer of “guruship” acceptable for the *Bhaktas*, the IMS, and the diocese is not on track. Both in the diocese and in the IMS community not many young priests are willing to work for the *Khrist Bhaktas*. This could create a future leadership vacuum.

The community formation of the *Bhaktas* into a new community has not broken the central caste/*varṇ* barrier yet. Although we have seen some glimpses of such changes, other issues show that community formation is not in full swing. *Khrist Bhaktas* have not been able to enter into any inter-*varṇ* marriages or into a fuller communion. We also wanted to find out from some *Bhaktas* who are more committed, and at the same time who are from a higher *varṇ* than others, about their willingness and opinion about entering into marriage relationship with the *dalit* families. Up to now, no one has been able to marry with *dalit* families or give their daughter or son to such families. However, many of them placed

710 STACEY, *Strategic Management and Organisational Dynamics*, p. 18.

711 S.J. ZACCARO, A.L. RITTMAN & M.A. MARKS, ‘Team Leadership’, in *The Leadership Quarterly*, 12, 2001, 4, p. 457. Collaboration points to reduction of autonomy which the priests do not want to give up. For the details on the importance of Collaboration, See J. VAN DIGGELEN, J.M. BRADSHAW, M. JOHNSON et.al., ‘Implementing Collective Obligations in Human-Agent Teams Using KAoS Policies’, in *Lecture Notes in Computer Science* 6069, 2010, 10, pp. 37-52.

before us their willingness to do so, but they are not able to do so because of concerns such as their relatives in the village, etc⁷¹².

Some leaders involved in the movement pointed out the existence of an unclear identity among the *Bhaktas*. They felt that the *Khrist Bhaktas* belong neither to Christianity nor to Hinduism, and see it as a temporary phase. To be member of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement no special events are marked, whereas to be a believer in any religion is to acknowledge an allegiance and to declare an identity, even if the person does not always have to be clear about the full content of his belief⁷¹³. The lack of clear identity in the religious sphere is a weakness of the movement.

Another weakness of the movement is the attitude of some *aguās* whose interest is financial gain. We have also seen the presence of *aguās* who are self-appointed. They give the wrong impression of the whole *Khrist Bhakta* movement.

Closely associated is the weakness of a possible break away⁷¹⁴. We have already seen how the powerful and influential leader Omkar deserted the movement and started his own church. We have also seen the presence of some *aguās* who are self-appointed and others who are interested in financial gains. Such *aguās* can, at a later stage, break away, which will be a blow to the movement.

India is a country where plenty of guru-directed movements have appeared and died, and not many new religious movements were able to draw many people or sustain themselves for over hundred years. It is possible that the stress is diverted from Christ to the human guru in the *āśram*. Although, at present, Anil Dev is careful about this, the attitude of the *Bhaktas* cannot be changed overnight. Moreover, a future guru could divert the attention of the people away from Jesus to himself⁷¹⁵.

Syncretism, when considered as a negative concept, is also happening⁷¹⁶. The movement is mixing elements from both Christianity and Hinduism. On many occasions, new *Bhaktas* listen to other devotees and their interpretation of Christianity. What the new devotees believe may not be what the church teaches, but can be the interpretation and assimilation by the devotees themselves. Since the gathering is large and no personal attention can be given, an indiscriminate mixing of religious belief and practice is possible.

712 The traditional Christians in other parts of India like Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, or Tamil Nadu, do not enter into marriage relationship with the lower caste Christians.

713 M. RUEL, 'Christians as Believers', in G. HARVEY (ed.), *Ritual and Religious Belief. A Reader*, New York, Routledge, 2005, p. 262.

714 We have included it as a weakness but it can also be seen as a threat since such *aguās* can be considered both as outsiders and insiders.

715 This can be both a weakness and a threat of the movement.

716 It can be looked at as a weakness as well as a threat.

4.5.3. Opportunities for this Movement

On the outside, the *Khrist Bhakta* movement has created an ambience and an atmosphere where faith in Christ and the proclamation of faith in Christ is not rejected but welcomed and embraced. Moreover, the political situation in the province is also favourable to such formations. A *dalit* woman belonging to a secular political party (Bahujan Samāj Party) heads the government in the province of Uttar Pradesh, and the RSS⁷¹⁷ affiliated groups and its political outfits have been out of political power for several years⁷¹⁸.

The *Khrist Bhakta* movement is an excellent opportunity for presenting an alternative model of being church in India. Taking into consideration the situation in India, and its cultural differences, this gives us a concrete model acceptable to the people at large. It is a unique place where people have accepted Christ and publically proclaimed their faith in Him while remaining within the fold of Hindu culture. Formerly, there were individuals who accepted Christ and tried to live as his disciples in an Indian way. But, here, people in large numbers have committed themselves to faith in Christ.

It is also an excellent opportunity for the formation of a community based on Christ. In this movement, people belonging to different *varṇas* stand shoulder to shoulder. It gives an opportunity to challenge the *varṇ* barriers and other differences, which divide people and open a way for community formation.

Up to now in the North Indian context, only the *dalits* had accepted Christianity, and people from higher *varṇas* had kept themselves away from the Christian faith. In this movement, people from all castes, including the high castes and, in some cases, even Muslims are joining the movement. Hence, it is an opportunity for the church or Christianity in India to make concrete its openness to members of all castes.

Baptism into Christianity implies in India a change from one social community to another with social and legal implications. It is not limited to a personal religious choice. Therefore, baptism is opposed with tooth and nail by Hindu groups⁷¹⁹. In the *Khrist Bhakta* movement, the *Bhaktas* are not forced to change their social and cultural community, and are not transferred from Hindu Personal law to Christian Personal law. At the same time, the church needs not opt out of her obligation to preach the Gospel with a view to making disciples for Christ. Thus, it gives us an excellent opportunity for a new model of living Christian commitment and possibly being the Church in an Indian context.

It is an opportunity to respect Indian culture since, as Donald McGavran says, “each culture has an inalienable dignity and right to exist; no man has the right to

⁷¹⁷ We had given their details in the second chapter (2.1.2.1).

⁷¹⁸ In the election 2012, the *dalit* chief minister lost the elections, and another political party called *Sa-majvadi party* (socialist party) has come to power. This party also is considered as a secular party.

⁷¹⁹ H. STAFFNER, ‘Conversion to Christianity. Seen from Hindu Point of view’, in M. DHAVAMONY (ed.), *Evangelization Dialogue and Development*, Roma, Universita Gregoriana Editrice, 1972, p. 235.

change it”⁷²⁰. Here is an opportunity to share the Christian faith without being arrogant towards other religions and cultures. It opens a window to preach faith in Christ while not advocating Western culture.

The integration of charismatic elements in this movement is an opportunity for the Church in India to hear the call of the Second Vatican Council for the renewal of life in the Church. This renewal work of the Holy Spirit is to be received and integrated to the whole life of Church⁷²¹. The *Khrist Bhakta* movement has integrated into itself several charismatic elements. The spiritual revolution that the charismatic elements bring into the church is thus an opportunity for the church to renew itself.

The charismatic movement attracts many people and encourages some of them to go deeply into the spiritual life⁷²². Those who grow in spirituality have to be taken care of, while those few *Bhaktas* who become mystics will need different spiritual nourishment. Now what is practiced is providing the same food for everyone. Here is an opportunity to provide a higher spirituality to the more devoted and seekers of a deeper spiritual life⁷²³.

We have seen in the religious practices of the devotees’ elements belonging to both Hinduism and Christianity. This provides us with an occasion for the integration and meeting of the best parts from these religions. It also provides the already existing churches in North India many lessons for inculturation and contextualization.

4.5.4. Threats to this Movement

One of the important threats to the movement is the presence of a large number of Hindu fundamentalist groups, albeit they are silent now⁷²⁴. The North Indian history of communal violence, especially the attacks on Christian communities in the recent past led by some Hindu fundamentalist groups, show that a simple provocation is enough to set communal fire in the area and wipe away the movement or stop its further growth.

There are some Catholic priests who also baptise the *Bhaktas* and make them part of the church. The diocese has a general policy concerning the baptism of the devotees, but we have seen that this policy is not always followed. There are priests who follow their own policy regarding the *Khrist Bhaktas* and this is a threat to the movement. Moreover, most importantly, the very policy of baptism (even after a certain period of catechising) in itself is a threat to the movement as it turns the movement from an end to a means. The baptised then cease to be

720 D. MCGAVRAN, *The Clash Between Christianity and Cultures*, Washington, Canon Press, 1974, p. 2.

721 P. HOCKEN, *The Challenges of the Pentecostal Charismatic and Messianic Jewish Movements. The Tensions of the Spirit*, Farnham/Burlington, Ashgate, 2009, p. 58.

722 It can also dispel many after the initial attraction.

723 Something similar to the provision of religious life in the Catholic Church, meant for those who like to follow Christ more radically.

724 The present political party who runs the government may not retain the power in the next general elections. Or the same party could have a change of leadership who may be against the Christians.

Khrish Bhaktas and baptism becomes a tool in the hands of the anti-Christian elements to use against Christianity. This practice ultimately is against the very model of the *Khrish Bhakta* movement. More seriously, once baptism is begun then the movement depreciates from a possible model of the church to merely a means for evangelization in the traditional way.

Some individuals and groups from several denominations are working in the area and baptising the devotees too soon. The strategy followed by such groups is to disguise their true identity at the initial meetings with the potential recruits, and overpower them with several kinds of inducements and offers⁷²⁵. They break the movement into smaller pieces and, at the same time, work against the growth of the whole movement. The alienation such groups bring between people is extreme⁷²⁶. They divide the community of devotees into denominational groups transmitting the existing divisions in the Christianity to the devotees. These divisions may cause mutual rivalry and hatred. This may, in turn, take the movement in a direction that does not stimulate a sound inculturation.

4.6. The Interpretation of the *Khrish Bhakta* Movement

The various religious practices manifest the faith of the *Khrish Bhaktas*. Although belief is fundamentally an interior condition, there is an intimate relationship between ritual expressions and belief because it is in these expressions that belief is outwardly made explicit⁷²⁷. People can show their religious commitment and religious affiliation in various ways. However, participation in rituals and other expressions are the occasions when we are able to observe their faith and commitment. Evidence of people's commitment is their participation in the religious behaviour⁷²⁸. Living in an overlapping world of Hinduism and Christianity, "the Christianity" of *Khrish Bhaktas* is different from the other forms of Christianity. They are the first generation *Khrish Bhaktas* who have accepted Christian faith into their already existing framework. People are not like empty bottles that can be filled with whatever we want. They do not take new information into a vacu-

725 G.D. CHRYSSIDES & M.Z. WILKINS, *A Reader in New Religious Movements*, London/New York, Continuum, 2006, p. 401.

726 M.O. ELUE, 'The Challenge of Pentecostalism in the Nigerian Church', in A.G. NNAMANI (ed.), *The New Religious Movements. Pentecostalism in Perspective*, Benin City, Theological Association of Nigeria, 2007, p. 74.

727 HARVEY, *Ritual and Religious Belief*, pp. 1-4. In the introduction to this book the author discusses the relationship between the rituals and belief. Geertz considers rituals to be the constitutive part of the religion. In his view rituals are almost synonymous with his view of religion. See GEERTZ, 'Religion as a Cultural System', in M. BANTON (ed.), *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, London, Tavistock, 1973, pp. 1-46.

728 R.H. CRAPO, *Anthropology of Religions. The Unity and Diversity of Religions*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 2003, p. 180. For Victor Turner the meaning of the ritual symbols is to be explored in the ritual action which implies that the meaning of a ritual becomes clear in the context of its performance. Therefore, we have observed and participated in the performance of the religious practices of the devotees in the *āśram*, at home and in the village. See for details V. TURNER 'Frame, Flow and Reflection. Ritual and Drama as Public Liminality', in M. BENAMOU & C. CHARLES (eds.), *Performance and Postmodern Culture*, Wisconsin, Milwaukee. Centre for Twentieth Century Studies, 1977, p. 44.

um, but they relate it to what they already have and what they know. However, this new information eventually may play a prominent role and may even transform their framework. The Christianity of the *Khrist Bhaktas* is a combination of both Hindu and Christian frameworks. In order to comprehend this Christianity we shall interpret the religious practices of the devotees. Taking both verbal and non-verbal elements of the religious practices of the *Khrist Bhaktas*, we shall ascertain whether these come from the Hindu framework, the Christian framework, or both.

Before we proceed, it is important that we present in brief the essentials of both the Hindu and the Christian frameworks⁷²⁹. This presentation of both frameworks focusing on their religious domain will help us identify the elements and the framework or frameworks to which they belong. Thereafter, we shall investigate each element in the religious practices of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement and examine them. We shall detect its origin, use, and meaning. Depending on the origin, use, and meaning of each element we shall decide to which framework each of them belong. Thereafter, we shall look for indications for any change of the framework behind these practices. We shall also look at the nature of these changes to see how deep or peripheral they are.

4.6.1. The Hindu Framework

Hinduism cannot be reduced to a religion but is an amalgamation of cultures, religions, and ethics linked coherently together in a framework⁷³⁰. In general, we could perceive a cyclic worldview in Hinduism. In this section, we shall give a brief outline of the Hindu world view. We do not treat the whole of the Hindu worldview, but limit ourselves only to the spiritual aspects. First, we shall present a short exposition of the Hindu understanding of God, cosmos, and human beings that are the basis and the basics of any worldview. Thereafter, we shall present the Hindu view of spiritual life depicting the Hindu spiritual framework. The goal of the spiritual life and methods, or rather, the paths taken by the Hindus in reaching their target, becomes the focus of our investigation. Thereafter, the Hindu temple worship together with the urban and rural spiritual practices will be explored to unearth the framework behind these spiritual practices.

4.6.1.1. The Concept of God

An examination of the Vedic texts gives us the idea that there were different gods like *Indrā*, *Agni*, *Varuṇ*, and others who were at different times at the centre of

729 For the importance of frameworks, see M.P. LYNCH, *Truth in Context. An Essay on Pluralism and Objectivity*, Cambridge MIT Press, 1998, p. 51.

730 Hinduism has neither a single founder nor one religious leader. It has neither a single religious symbol nor a single holy place.

the Vedic religion⁷³¹. The Epic and Puranic texts exalt new deities and slowly marginalized the Vedic deities. What we find here is the emergence of Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, and Śakta deities. Unlike the Vedic deities, these three come to prominence, stay for long time, and continue to play a central role in the lives of majority of Hindus. Brahmā is also occasionally cited as part of the *trimūrti* (trinity), or three forms of a supreme divinity Brahm, in which Brahmā is the creator, Viṣṇu is the preserver and Śiv is the destroyer. However, Śiv and Viṣṇu come to prominence. Only a few temples in India offer worship to Brahmā and his worship has become virtually extinct⁷³². Śiv becomes the important figure as the One God and the Lord for many millions of Hindus. Śiv, the God responsible for destruction, stands out as the “great God” among all the deities of the Hindu religion⁷³³. The phallic emblem, the *liṅg*, as symbol of the creative power of Śiv is the most widely venerated cult-object in Śiv worship⁷³⁴. At the same time, Viṣṇu grows in stature and through his incarnations incorporates other deities such as Rām and Kṛṣṇ who have their own cults⁷³⁵. The Viṣṇu tradition has the greatest books of Indian literature of which Rāmāyaṇ and Mahābhārat are prominent ones. This God takes several manifestations and is very active in the lives of people through numerous incarnations of various degrees. Among the incarnations, Rām and Kṛṣṇ enjoy particular favour and an immense literature, stories, and myths have grown around them⁷³⁶. The Śiv mythologies associate Gaṇeś (the elephant-headed deity) with Śiva’s family while Hanumān (the deity in the form of monkey) is associated with Rām and thus incorporated into the Viṣṇu worship⁷³⁷. “The genealogies and family trees of the main deities so frequent in the purāṇas are attempts, not always successful, to coordinate the various popular deities and to make them appear, if not as manifestations of the one God, then at least as his children or servants”⁷³⁸. Goddesses assume the role of the Supreme Being in *Śāktism*. It is in Tāntras that the Goddesses come to occupy the supreme place⁷³⁹. Śakti means “power” personified in the Goddess, the Divine Mother to whom is ascribed all the functions of Viṣṇu and Śiv⁷⁴⁰. The worship of mother goddesses is very important even today. Pārvatī, Kālī, and Durgā have a great following among the Hindus. Although historically the development of *Śāktism*, as an organized form of religion with its own theology came after the development of

731 K.K. KLOSTERMAIER, *A Survey of Hinduism*, New York, State University of New York Press, 1989, p. 128.

732 *Ibid.* p. 133. The most important temple of Brahmā is the Pushkar Temple in Rajasthan.

733 ASHAROSE, ‘Shiva’, in V. MATAJI (ed.), *Shabda Shakti Sangam*, Rishikesh, Jeevan Dhara Sadhana Kutir, 1995, p. 37. The followers of Śiv are called *Śaivites*. One should not associate destruction as negative but at the appointed time he does consummation or transformation.

734 P. FALLON, ‘The Gods of Hinduism’, in R. ANTOINE, et al, (eds.), *Religious Hinduism. A Presentation and Appraisal*, Allahabad, St. Paul Publications, 1968, p. 85.

735 H. RODRIGUES, *Introducing Hinduism*, New York/London, Routledge, 2006, p. 190.

736 KLOSTERMAIER, *A Survey of Hinduism*, p. 139.

737 There are also plenty of temples in honour of Hanumān and Gaṇeś.

738 KLOSTERMAIER, *A Survey of Hinduism*, p. 142.

739 *Ibid.* p. 267.

740 *Ibid.* p. 140.

Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism, today almost all schools of Hinduism have strong elements of Śāktism blended with their teaching⁷⁴¹.

In the *Upāṇiṣads* Brahman (Brahm) becomes the term around which the loftiest religious speculation has revolved for thousands of years and it is still the term used to designate the Supreme Being⁷⁴². The speculative philosophy of the *Upāṇiṣads* developed in the subsequent centuries into what is known as the *Vedānta* philosophy⁷⁴³. The *Vedānta* focuses on the study and understanding of the *Upāṇiṣads*. Three schools of Vedānta, namely, Advait/Advaita (non-duality), the Viśiṣṭādvait/Viśiṣṭādvaita (qualified non-duality) and the Dvait/Dvaita (duality) are important. They speak of the relationship between the absolute supreme Brahman and the individual *ātmā* (soul). This *Vedānta* school of thought has come down to the present day and gives us rather a coherent concept of God.

According to the *Advait* School of Śaṅkara (traditionally 788-820), there is only one thing that is absolutely real, and that is Brahman. It teaches that Brahman is the only thing in existence and with Brahman the cosmic and the individual souls are one⁷⁴⁴. This Brahman is indivisible and *nirguṇ*, i.e., without attributes⁷⁴⁵. “This term denotes a non-dual pure consciousness which pervades the universe and yet remains outside of it”⁷⁴⁶. This Brahman cannot be the object of worship or prayer, and no relationship whatsoever can be established with it⁷⁴⁷. By means of its own inscrutable power called *māyā* (illusion), the unconditioned Brahman manifests itself as the conditioned Brahman (*saguṇ* Brahman) endowed with attributes – the personal God. The God conceived through the mind as having divine qualities is this personal God, *saguṇ* Brahman or Īśvar⁷⁴⁸.

The *Viśiṣṭādvaita* of Rāmānuj (1056-1137) upholds that there is only one Absolute Reality and that is Brahman, but it is qualified because according to him it is meaningless to comprehend, relate, or to speak about a *nirguṇ* Brahman. Therefore, he says that *māyā* is real and Brahman is *saguṇ* and is Īśvar or possessing qualities⁷⁴⁹. The soul or *ātmā* is not identical with Brahman, but is the aspect of Brahman, wholly dependent upon him. The world for him is real and creation, preservation, and destruction are the activities of Brahman⁷⁵⁰.

The *Dvait* of Madhva (1238-1317) postulates the existence of three types of entities, namely, Brahman (Īśvar), soul (*jīvātmā*), and matter (*prakṛti*). However, he speaks of God who creates the universe as the independent reality while the universe that is created by God has a dependent existence. Madhva emphasizes

741 *Ibid.* p. 275.

742 *Ibid.* p. 132.

743 RODRIGUES, *Introducing Hinduism*, p. 249.

744 S. CAVE, *Redemption. Hindu and Christian*, London, Oxford University Press, 1919, p. 17.

745 RODRIGUES, *Introducing Hinduism*, p. 250.

746 S. NIKHILANANDA, *Hinduism. Its Meaning for the Liberation of the Spirit*, London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1958, p. 29.

747 *Ibid.* p. 35.

748 S. NITYESTHANANDA, ‘The Concept of God in Hinduism’, in V. MATAJI (ed.), *Shabda Shakti Sangam*, p. 21.

749 RODRIGUES, *Introducing Hinduism*, p. 252.

750 NIKHILANANDA, *Hinduism*, p. 36.

the absolute independence and the unutterable majesty of Brahman and stresses upon the two aspects of divinity, namely, the perfection of being and freedom from all limitations⁷⁵¹. The souls are limited by both space and attributes and possess only temporal pervasion in the sense of existing at all times⁷⁵². The souls and the matter are dependent on Brahman for existence, but Brahman is totally independent. Madhva says that the soul is placed at the centre of the triple categories of *Īśvar-jīvātma-prakṛti*. Therefore, the soul can get involved in the meshes of *saṁsārā* or bondage when the soul leans towards the matter. The soul gets liberated if it leans to the other side. Madhva considers God as *saguṇ* and as personal and he identifies the Brahman of the *Vedāntā* with Viṣṇu⁷⁵³. Thus, Viṣṇu is not just one deity but the supreme One, the object of worship, and all other gods are subordinated to Him.

Normally, the ordinary people believe that God is one in all the manifestations, and all the manifestations are of God himself. “They may not be able to figure out in theological terms how the many gods and the One God hang together and they may not be sure about the hierarchy among the many manifestations, but they know that ultimately there is only One and that the many somehow merge into the One”⁷⁵⁴. Therefore, they accept the extended powers of God working in nature and name it accordingly. Because of this kind of faith, when some people claim to be the incarnation of Viṣṇu, people in general accept such claims. Hindu theology has many ways of explaining the unity of Brahman in the diversity of deities, meeting the different needs of the people and incorporating the local traditions and specific revelations.

4.6.1.2. The Vision of the Cosmos

The origin of the visible world is explained in Hindu mythology in various ways⁷⁵⁵. The Vedas have two important descriptions in *puruṣa sūkta* and *nāśadīya sūkta*. The earth is described in *puruṣa sūkta* as emerging from the thousand-headed, thousand-eyed, and thousand-footed *puruṣa* (the cosmic being), a kind of primeval giant to whom gods themselves sacrifice. He emanated a female creative principle called *virāj* and from this he is reborn, and then his parts became the world. The moon came from his spirit, the sun from his eyes, the heavens from his skull. From his mouth the *Brahmaṇs* emerged, while from his arms, thighs, and feet came the other *varṇas* (castes)⁷⁵⁶. The *nāśadīya sūkta*⁷⁵⁷ is a cosmology hymn that briefly describes the chaos that preceded creation, as

751 B.N.K. SHARMA, *Philosophy of Sri Madhvacarya*, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidas, 1986, pp. 323-329.

752 *Ibid.* p. 329

753 RODRIGUES, *Introducing Hinduism*, p. 253.

754 KLOSTERMAIER, *A Survey of Hinduism*, p. 144.

755 Besides what we present here the myth of *Hiranyagarbha* from Rīg Veda is also important.

756 A. MICHAELS, *Hinduism. Past and Present*, trans. BARBARA HARSHAV, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1998, p. 286.

757 Rīg Veda, 10. 129.

there was neither existence nor non-existence, no sky, no earth, there was neither death nor immortality. However, there was only the Breath, which breathed breathlessly. This breath desired to create and there was creation.

The Hindu cosmology is cyclical⁷⁵⁸. In general, Hindus consider both time and creation as in a repetitive cyclical movement. The created world does not have a singular history, “the universe has come into being several times and gone out of existence several times and this process has been going on from beginning-less time and will go on forever”⁷⁵⁹. God the Brahmā brings the cosmos as we have mentioned earlier, into existence and He, as Viṣṇu, sustains it and as Śiv, He is the destroyer of this universe. It is not an act done finally. We can speak neither of a creation nor of a real destruction, but only a manifestation on the one hand and dissolution on the other⁷⁶⁰.

A clear description of the Hindu cosmos with its cyclical creation scheme of time subdivided into *yugas* (an era or an age), *manvāntaras* (age of Manu, i.e., Manu + *antara* = *manvāntara*), and so on, as well as its spatial layout of islands and concentric oceans, are found in the *purāṇic* writings⁷⁶¹. There are four *yugas* called *Kṛita* or *Satya*, *Tṛeta*, *Dvāpara*, and *Kali*.

The basic cycle is the *kalpa*, a day of Brahmā which is equal to 4320 million earthly years. His night is of equal length. Three hundred and sixty such days and nights constitute a year of Brahma and his life lasts for 100 such years. The largest cycle is therefore 311,040,000 million years long, after which the whole universe returns to the ineffable world spirit, until another creator god is evolved⁷⁶².

According to the general Hindu understanding, the universe is shaped like an egg called *Brahmāṇḍa* or the egg of Brahma. Though there are some variations in the descriptions of these worlds, it is in general called as *tri-lōkā*, i.e., triple world system, namely, the world of heavens, the world of human beings, and the underworld⁷⁶³. It is different from the Christian understanding of heaven, earth, and hell. According to Hinduism, this cosmos has 21 zones, 6 above the earth called the heavens, seven below the earth called the *pātāl* or the nether earth, below it

758 In the Western worldview, the cosmos comes into existence once and goes out once and for all. But in Hinduism, everything is cyclical, and has no beginning and end, but goes on eternally.

759 A. SHARMA, *Classical Hindu Thought. An Introduction*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 5-6.

760 It is the duty of Viṣṇu to ensure that the dissolution does not happen prematurely. Therefore, he takes *avātārs* (incarnations) to rectify or bring back normalcy in case of defect. Up to now he has taken 9 *avātārs*, namely, a fish, tortoise, boar, a man-lion, dwarf, Paraśuram, Ram, Kṛṣṇ and Buddh. One more is to come at the end of this age, and then Śiv would put an end to this cycle and the next one will emerge. See for details A.L. BASHAM, *The Wonder that was India*, London, Sidwick & Jackson, 1968, reprint, p. 6.

761 RODRIGUES, *Introducing Hinduism*, p. 189.

762 BASHAM, *The Wonder that was India*, p. 323.

763 RODRIGUES, *Introducing Hinduism*, New York/ London, Routledge, 2006, p. 49.

there are 7 zones called the *narak* or hell. The six heavens are of an increasing beatitude. The *pātāl* is the abode of *nāgs* and other mythical beings but not an unpleasant place, whereas, the *narak* is conceived as having an existence of increasing misery and is inhabited by souls in torment⁷⁶⁴.

The *Upāṇiṣads* present the world, on the one hand, as coming from Brahman, and, on the other hand, as Brahman. “As the hair and nails grow on a living person, as the threads come out of a spider, as sparks fly from a burning fire, as melodies issue from a flute, or waves rise on the ocean, so also the universe came from Brahman”⁷⁶⁵. According to Brahadaranyaka *Upāṇiṣad*, in the beginning there was only the Supreme Being. He looked around and saw nothing beside himself. He divided himself into two: husband and wife. Thus, human beings were created. She turned into a cow and he became a bull. She turned into a mare, he became a stallion. And thus various kinds of animals came into existence⁷⁶⁶.

Vedānta philosophy, especially for Śaṅkara and Rāmānuj, the visible world has its origin in Brahman, the absolute⁷⁶⁷. For Śaṅkara the world is *māyā* (illusion) or appearance, and for Rāmānuj, it is the body of God, sharing some of the qualities of God⁷⁶⁸. Many people share the idea that temporal goods or the world is *māyā* or delusionary, but it is from God, therefore it has the presence of divinity. For Madhva, the matter (*prakṛti*) and souls (*jīvātman*) have their own reality and existence, but are eternally dependent on Brahman. This Brahman takes on a personal role and controls the universe. Madhva speaks of five fundamental, eternal, and real differences that exist, namely, between individual soul (*jīvā*) and God (Brahman/Viṣṇu), between matter (*prakṛti*) and Brahman, between matter and souls, among souls (*jīvātman*) and among various types of matter. Therefore, one of the important features of this world is that it is characterised by duality. The opposites of *dharm* and *adharma*, good and evil, hot and cold, gods and demons co-exist in this world⁷⁶⁹.

4.6.1.3. The Vision of Human Beings

According to Hindu thinking, the human being possesses three bodies and a spirit called *jīva* or *ātman*. The three bodies are the gross physical body, the subtle body and the causal body⁷⁷⁰. The *ātman* is that element in the human being,

764 BASHAM, *The Wonder that was India*, p. 490.

765 NIKHILANANDA, *Hinduism*, pp. 40-41.

766 KLOSTERMAIER, *A Survey of Hinduism*, p. 111.

767 *Ibid.* p. 123.

768 *Ibid.*

769 *Ibid.*

770 A. SHARMA, *Classical Hindu Thought*, p. 9.

which is not subject to change, and is the core of one's being. This can exist without bodies, while the bodies cannot exist without the *ātman*⁷⁷¹.

One's spiritual identity is that of an individual *jīva* or *ātman*. This *ātman* is a spark of God⁷⁷². At the same time, similar sparks of God are seen in all the external things like rivers, trees, human beings, animals, oceans, stars, sun, moon, mountains, and even in land. Everything is seen as an extension of God and so they are divine. This *ātman* is neither born nor dies even when the body is dead. In the Bhagavat Gita this process is compared to the way a person puts on new garments after giving up old ones; the *ātman*, in the same manner, takes up new material body after giving up the old ones⁷⁷³. Therefore, one person carries with him or her, the fruits of his/her action from one life to the next. Those that lead a wicked life take birth as subhuman beings. Those who fulfilled their moral duties, and sought the results of their action, go to the plane of moon (lesser heaven) and reap their fruits of actions, and are reborn as human beings. And those who lead an intense spiritual life on earth, go to the *brāhmālōka* (the world of Brahma/highest heaven) and some obtain liberation and some return the earth⁷⁷⁴.

Vedānta describes human beings as a 5-layered entity like the sheaths of an onion⁷⁷⁵. The outermost layer refers to the physical body and is termed as *annamayātman* (the corporal layer), the second is the *prāṇamayātman* (the biological layer), while the third is the *manōmayātman* (the psychological layer). The fourth inner layer is called the *vijñānamayātman* (the intellectual layer), while *ānandmayāman* (pure bliss) is the fifth and innermost layer of the *jīva*. Śaṅkara considers reality as Brahman and so the individual reality is only *māyā*. It has its implications for spiritual life, which we shall deal with below. Ramanuj believes that the *jīva* is eternal and is of the same substance as that of Brahman⁷⁷⁶. *Jīva* is a particle of which God is the whole. The individual souls are distinct from each other and are viewed as the body of Brahman. The soul sprung from Brahman and will enjoy its separate existence. Madhva teaches that the distinction between Brahman and soul is real but the individual souls are dependent on Brahman. The *jīvas* are innumerable and they are eternal and undergo suffering because of the connection with the material body.

771 *Ibid.* In the rebirth, the subtle body and causal body (not physical) together with *ātman* migrate.

772 As the unconditioned Brahman, in association with *māyā* manifests itself as conditioned Brahman, so also in association with the same *māyā*, it becomes the individual soul. Under the control of *māyā* the individual soul forgets its real nature, while the conditioned Brahman keeps the *māyā* under his control. See for details NIKHILANANDA, *Hinduism*, pp. 49-50.

773 *The Bhagavat Gita*, 2. 22. *The Bhagavat Gita*, 2. 22. Trans. E. EASWARAN, Tomales: The Blue Mountain Centre for Meditation, 1985.

774 Therefore the view of an individual as born into a higher or lower caste is merited by the conduct in the prior life. For details see M. WEBER, *The Religion of India*, Illinois, The Free Press, 1960, p. 121.

775 E.S. PALISPIS, *Introduction to Values Education*, Quezon City, Rex Book Store, 1995, pp. 47-48.

776 Ramanuja speaks about three types of souls, namely, the *nitya* (eternal), the *mukta* (free), and the *baddha* (bound).

4.6.1.4. The View of Spiritual Life

Historically, the ancient *Vedic* times gave importance to *yajña* (sacrifice). For the ancient Hindus nothing was possible without *yajña* and all was attainable through *yajña*⁷⁷⁷. It was performed by qualified priests and in the prescribed form. Oblations were poured into the fire as a means of offering them to the gods. The aim of the performance was often gaining certain results in life, mostly material results⁷⁷⁸. Sacrifices were performed for gaining all sorts of worldly goods and they were also considered great remedies for all the ills of life⁷⁷⁹.

Later, in the *Upāṇiṣadic* period, “Contemplation became the dominant mode of spiritual life for Hindus following the decline of *Vedic* culture”⁷⁸⁰. Ritualism was considered as inferior, although the *yajña* tradition continued to exist. The *Upāṇiṣadic* age is the age of real knowledge of the Self, and all great scholars of this age were interested in self-realization, through the knowledge of identity between the *ātman* and the Brahman⁷⁸¹.

The Bhagavad Gītā articulates the spiritual paths clearly. Although divided into eighteen chapters, each of which is called a teaching on a particular *yog(ā)* or discipline, its teachings are conventionally grouped into three major approaches to liberation⁷⁸². These are *bhakti mārg* (the path of devotion), *karm mārg* (the path of labour), and the *jñān mārg* (the path of knowledge). An individual may choose any of these *mārgās*. But many times people follow a mixture of the paths since the practice of one *mārg* does not exclude the others. The *jñān mārg* is largely preferred by the intellectual elite, and the *karm mārg* stresses the preservation of the status quo and thus presupposes high-caste standing⁷⁸³, while the *bhakti mārg* has a universal appeal. *Bhakti mārg* promises salvation and heaven to all the castes, women, and children. Therefore, *bhakti mārg* has greater following and appreciation among the ordinary people.

A better comprehension of the Hindu spiritual framework is possible by grasping the thinking that is lying at the foundation of these *mārgās*. In India, renunciation of the world for attaining *mokṣ* was considered the preferred spiritual path, but it was not possible for all the people to renounce the world. The *karm mārg* gives an option for those people who want stay in the world, or those who are forced to stay in the world, because it combines action and renunciation. This path consists in performing the duties of one’s stage in life with a spirit of detachment⁷⁸⁴. The duty of one person depends on his *āśram* (stage of life) and

777 R.D. NIRAKARI, ‘Rituals and Sacraments in Hinduism. A Historical Perspective’, in C.O. MCMULLEN (ed.), *Rituals and Sacraments in Indian Religions*, Delhi, ISPCK, 1979, p. 17.

778 Attainment of all worldly goodness depended on the grace of gods present in the natural phenomena

779 NIRAKARI, ‘Rituals and Sacraments in Hinduism’, p. 17.

780 S. BHAJANANANDA, ‘Hindu Prayer, Worship, Contemplation’, in V. MATAJI (ed.), *Shabda Shakti Sangam*, p. 75. Spiritual realization was attainable through the knowledge of oneness with the ultimate.

781 NIRAKARI, ‘Rituals and Sacraments in Hinduism’, p. 18.

782 RODRIGUES, *Introducing Hinduism*, p. 158.

783 What *karm* one should do is related to the theory of *dharm(a)*. One has to perform one’s *dharm(a)*- of the caste and stage of life.

784 SHARMA, *Classical Hindu Thought*, p. 127.

*varṇ*⁷⁸⁵. According to this *mārg*, the action is not given up but the fruit of the action is given up. It is explained in the *Bhagavad Gita* as, “set thy heart upon work, but never on its reward. Work thou not for a reward; but never shall thou cease to do thy work”⁷⁸⁶. The aim of *karm mārg* is to keep the *ātman* free from the fruit of the actions - both good and bad actions. For every action, there is resultant fruit, and the *ātman* has to bear the fruit. If action is good, then a good or higher life will be followed, while if action is bad, then a lower life will be followed. In both cases, one is caught up in *samsārā* (the repeating cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth). By giving up the fruits of the actions one gets rid of this cycle.

The *jñān mārg* is directed towards the *nirguṇ* Brahman and it aims at the attainment of the God realization, which is identifying the *ātman* (individual soul) with the *paramātmā* (Supreme Being). The idea behind this path is the realization that what is real is the Brahman and all else is *māyā*. The individual soul is none other than the universal soul⁷⁸⁷. Through knowledge, one has to come to this realization, then there is no need for further liberation, because this itself is liberation. The means to achieve this end is to follow the classical *aṣṭāṅga yog* (the eight-fold *yog*). Śāṅkara upholds the *jñān mārg* as the ultimate means through which liberation is attained. Remember that he had taught that there is only one thing that is absolutely real, and that is Brahman. His theory teaches that our perception of separate things is due to the sway of *māyā*. He equates *māyā* with ignorance (*avidyā*). Therefore, the realization of one's true self as Brahman is achieved when ignorance is removed through the path of transcendental knowledge.

Bhakti mārg is directed towards the *saguṇ* Brahman or personal God. Here the renunciation of the world is not directly intended, but is the result. God becomes the only object of love for the devotee and attachment to worldly things, as a result, withers away. This path does not demand the suppression of natural impulses but tells the devotee to turn to the Lord⁷⁸⁸. The attainment of *mokṣ* is not an easy task for simple souls. The devotee surrenders himself to God's will and strives to love the Lord. The divine love is considered the nectar that leads man to immortality. A sincere love for, and devotion to, the divine is regarded as leading the devotee to the Absolute⁷⁸⁹. This path is not limited to the status of any person, but open to all stages, castes, or sexes. Salvation is attainable at any stage of life because it is bestowed upon individuals as an act of divine grace⁷⁹⁰. The love of God makes them closer to God and consequently leads them to com-

785 So every caste/*varṇ* and every stages of life will be preserved.

786 *Bhagavad Gita* 2.47.

787 This is in line with the Vedic utterance like “thou art that” (*tat tvam assī*) and “I am Brahman” (*aham brahmāsmi*).

788 NIKHILANANDA, *Hinduism*, p. 247.

789 RODRIGUES, *Introducing Hinduism*, p. 163.

790 M.T. HORSTMANN, ‘Bhakti and Monasticism’, in G.D. SONTHEIMER & H. KULKE (eds.), *Hinduism Reconsidered*, Delhi, Manohar Publishers, 1991, p. 127.

munion with Him, which finally releases the souls from *saṁsārā*⁷⁹¹. The emergence of the *bhakti* tradition marked the devotion to a personal God. The *bhakti* tradition that started in southern India spread to central and northern India with the emergence of several poet saints⁷⁹². The *bhakti* tradition got a boost with the philosophical teachings of Rāmānuj and Madhva. According to Rāmānuj, the central act of *bhakti* is self-surrender. According to Madhva, liberation is ultimately the result of God's grace (*prasād*).

Together with the theory of *karm yog* (the theory of detached actions), the *bhakti* tradition gained rather more prominence⁷⁹³. The spiritual life for most Hindus today is closely related to the faith in *karm* theory⁷⁹⁴. The accumulated sum of good or bad is called *karm*. This means that human actions are binding on the individual soul. Closely linked is the faith in the transmigration of soul, which means that the soul enters another body after death. The actions of an individual in the previous life determine the status of the present life. The deeds of present life decide the condition of next life. Thus, human life is a cycle of births, deaths, and rebirths. Liberation, called *mokṣ*, happens finally when the soul gets out of this cycle or *saṁsārā*. The spiritual pursuit is to save the soul from this cycle. Thus, attainment of *mokṣ* is considered as the supreme goal or aim of spiritual life⁷⁹⁵.

In the everyday religious world, the high gods are often not the focus⁷⁹⁶. The most important deity to a person, the *iṣṭ-devātā* (cherished deity), is a matter of choice. Most Hindus believe that the name of their own God, if recited often, would confer blessings and ultimate redemption⁷⁹⁷. The worship of *iṣṭ-devātā* can be done either at home or in the temple. People who take spiritual life seriously are initiated by a guru and given the name of *iṣṭ-devātā* by the guru as a *mantrā* (a word or a couple of words capable of spiritual transformation), which the disciple is supposed to chant at all times.

On the spiritual level, Hinduism is individualistic as it is each individual who has to work for his/her salvation or liberation. The individual soul has to bear the fruits of his/her actions. Others have no possibility of helping the salvation of someone else. Although there is the possibility and practice of offering sacrifices and *pūjās* in the name of someone else, the liberation is the task of each individual soul. Priesthood is not an organised body, and *sādhus*, *svāmīs*, *gurus*, and so on also can perform clerical functions. The role of intercession and mediation is

791 M. DAS, 'Bhakti Yoga', in V. MATAJI (ed.), *Shabda Shakti Sangam*, p. 102.

792 Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Surdas, Vallabha, Kabir, Tulsidas, Tukaram, Ravidas, Namdeo, Meera Bhai, and so on were some of the important *bhakti* poets.

793 The theory of *karmyog* is based on the second chapter verse 47 of the *Bhagavat Gita*, which states, "Seek to perform your duty, but lay not claim on its fruits. Be you not the producer of the fruits of *karm*, neither shall you lean towards inaction." The meaning of the word *karm* is action, while *karmyog* connotes the use of action as a channel of God-realization.

794 It is not fatalism, since *karm* can be influenced or even neutralized by religious practices.

795 *Mokṣ* (moksha) or liberation is not achieving heaven, but going beyond heaven and hell, beyond happiness and unhappiness.

796 MICHAELS, *Hinduism. Past and Present*, p. 215.

797 KLOSTERMAIER, *A Survey of Hinduism*, p. 154.

rather absent in the spirituality. “Worship, on the whole, is done by individuals, not by a collective which can be considered as parish”⁷⁹⁸. The purpose of any of the worship is to awaken the spirit within. Spirituality for Hindus is all about awakening the spirit, the *ātman*, the self, God within⁷⁹⁹.

4.6.1.5. Temple Worship

The important thing is that the temple is not a place of worship but is a place or abode or a sanctuary of God. There are no liturgical services conducted for the whole community or congregation and there are no sacraments initiated or administered in the temple⁸⁰⁰. Mostly, the temples are hereditarily owned by families⁸⁰¹. Every temple is dedicated to one primary god and the *mūrti* (image) of this god is placed in the prominent place called *garbhā grah*. Other images or *mūrtis* are also placed in the temple.

The deity is treated mostly like a king. The priest, before dawn, awakens the *mūrti* with music and light. Then the *mūrti* is bathed, dressed, given food, garlanded, *ārṭī* performed in front, and is now ready to give audience/*darśan* to pilgrims and devotees⁸⁰². The deity is offered water for washing the feet and given meals three times, mostly rice and fruit of which he eats the “subtle” part, leaving the “gross” material food for his worshippers, or to be given to the poor⁸⁰³. Three times the priests offer worship usually at sunrise, noon, and in the evening. By noon the *mūrti* is put to rest and the pilgrims are not given *darśan*. In the evening at dusk *ārṭī* is performed and the deity is left to sleep⁸⁰⁴.

There is no formal obligation for Hindus to visit the temple⁸⁰⁵. Only some Hindus visit the temple daily. Otherwise, the temples are visited on special occasions, for special needs, and for making special requests.

Worship or *pūjā* is primarily a matter between the individual and the deity. “Despite the social experience, the *pūjā* remains primarily a matter between the individual and the deity, even if the priest stands between”⁸⁰⁶. Even when a large crowd gathers, each person worships the deity all by himself. As one enters the temple after removing the shoes, one rings the bell to rouse the attention of the deity towards him/her. The *pūjā* has three important aspects. The first is the *darśan*, i.e., seeing the deity, which is the most important part. The mutual sight of the believer and God is considered the central part of *pūjā*⁸⁰⁷. Normally, Hindus do not say that they are going to the temple for sacrifice, worship, or prayer,

798 G. DIETRICH, *Culture, Religion and Development*, Bangalore, CSA Publications, 1978, p. 22.

799 S. VARANATH, ‘Foundation of the Spiritual life’, in V. MATAJI (ed.), *Shabda Shakti Sangam*, p. 85.

800 R. ANTOINE, ‘Rituals and Worship’, in R. ANTOINE (ed.), *Religious Hinduism*, p. 157.

801 There are also temples run by trust and owned by government etc.

802 NIKHILANANDA, *Hinduism*, p. 170.

803 BASHAM, *The Wonder that was India*, p. 338.

804 ANTOINE, ‘Rituals and Worship’, p. 157.

805 KLOSTERMAIER, *A Survey of Hinduism*, p. 307.

806 MICHAELS, *Hinduism. Past and Present*, p. 245.

807 *Ibid.* p. 230.

but for *darśan*. The second aspect of the *pūjā* is offering, where the devotee offers something to God in the form of flowers, sweets, or food (this is called *pūjā*). This is usually done on special occasions. The third is retrieving a part of what is offered called *prasād*, and consuming it. The worshiper gives the offering to the priest, bows before the image, takes a clockwise circumambulation called *pradikṣiṇa* around the *mūrti*, and at the end receives from the priest a little part of the offering (*prasād*)⁸⁰⁸. The *prasād* is mostly taken home to share it with family members.

People take different types of vows for gaining material and other benefits. Many votaries promise acts of self-mortification, such as walking round the temple a fixed number of times, covering the distance to the temple by continuous prostrations, taking their food without water, salt, giving away the hair at the shrine, and so on.

4.6.1.6. The Practice of Rural Religion

Unlike the more sophisticated religious practices, specifically the three *mārgās* of the urban and elite, the practice of religion in the rural context is very different. Village religion has a rather autonomous pattern and is more regulated by social pressures of castes and other practical situations than by any direct indoctrination through religious authorities. Rural religion is mainly concerned with the preservation of life, fertility of man and nature, birth and death, cure from diseases, and protection from evil spirits⁸⁰⁹. It is also concerned with the restoration of social harmony and festivals. Every village has its own local god or goddesses who are often assimilated into the Hindu pantheon through various myths⁸¹⁰.

Faith in the existence of the world of spirits is very strong in the rural Hindu population. They also have faith in the unfavourable constellations of stars and the evil eye. All living beings and even the crops can be affected by these evil spirits, evil eye, etc⁸¹¹. They believe that the spirit of the departed, especially those who suffered a violent or untimely death, can wander in nature and hurt living beings, especially relatives. They can possess people, can harm others, and bring disease and disaster to the people and village. These spirits have to be appeased.

Some wandering spirits are propitiated by offering them a home of worship in the form of a temple or a stone, etc. Many people wear amulets around the neck or hand to avoid the evil influence of the demons and to ward them off⁸¹². Small children are considered more vulnerable to the spirits, therefore sacred thread of red and black or amulets are tied around their necks, waist, or hand.

808 ANTOINE, 'Rituals and Worship', p. 158. Always the *mūrti* is at the right side of the person while the circumambulation is taken. Some people repeat it three times.

809 DIETRICH, *Culture, Religion and Development*, p. 59.

810 BASHAM, *The Wonder that was India*, p. 319.

811 A sacred thread is wound around hand or waist to protect the wearer.

812 ANTOINE, 'Rituals and Worship', p. 161.

As mentioned earlier, there are certain people called *ojhās* who are considered as having supernatural powers and ‘evil knowledge’ and who are able to control these spirits. Their help is sought very often in the face of troubles, sickness, etc. *Ojhās* are not respected but are rather feared since they are supposed to possess power over evil spirits. Often there is a tendency to believe in truth-tellers, palm readers, astrologists, medical quacks, gurus, or dream interpreters⁸¹³.

4.6.2. The Christian Framework

Christianity derives its name from Jesus of Nazareth (7-2 BC to 30-36AD) who is considered as the founder of the Christian faith. As a religion, it is founded on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ in whom Christians believe that God has revealed himself fully and definitively⁸¹⁴. The Christian religion grew in the context of Judaism and in its beginning, Christians did not think of themselves as separate from the Jewish people. They considered the Christian faith as a continuation and development of Judaism. It initially flourished in regions with which Judaism was traditionally associated⁸¹⁵.

Christianity is a large religion, numbering about 2 billion members from every continent. It has become divided into several distinct denominations and groups. These can be broadly placed into the following six groups or churches. They are the Orthodox Churches, the Roman Catholic Churches, the Anglican Churches, the Protestant Churches, the Independent Churches, and the Marginal Christians⁸¹⁶.

In this section, we shall give a brief outline of the Christian worldview. We do not go into the details of the theological, cultural, and doctrinal differences of all the above-mentioned churches, but present a short overview of the general Christian framework in order to acquaint someone who may be completely unfamiliar with Christian concepts. Our focus here is to give a short description on the spiritual life within the Christian framework in order to help to understand the spiritual basics underlying the Christian worldview. We limit our exposition

813 MICHAELS, *Hinduism. Past and Present*, p. 227.

814 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Journeying Together. The Catholic Church in Dialogue with the Religious Traditions of the World*, Vatican City, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1999, p. 98.

815 A.E. MCGRATH, *Christian Theology. An Introduction*, Oxford/Cambridge, Blackwell, 1994, p. 5.

816 The Protestant Church families arose from the various European Reformation Movements of the 15th and 16th centuries. The main groups among them are the Presbyterians, Reformed, Methodists, Baptists, Brethren, Mennonites, Lutherans, Quakers and Adventists. The Independent Churches originated mostly in the non-western world and do not belong to any of the other Churches. The neo-Pentecostal and the Charismatic groups are the major groups under this section. Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Church of Jesus Christ are the two major groups in the marginal Christian groups. See for details D.B. BARRETT, G.T. KURIAN & T.M. JOHNSON, *World Christian Encyclopaedia. A Composite Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World*, 2nd ed, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 16-18, See also T.M. JOHNSON & K.R. ROSS, *Atlas of Global Christianity*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2009, pp. 66-76, and E. MOLLAND, *Christendom. The Christian Churches, Their Doctrines, Constitutional Forms and Ways of Worship*, London, A. R. Mowbray & Co. Limited, 1961.

mainly to the spiritual aspects of the worldview since we use this framework for interpreting the Christianity of the *Khrisht Bhakta* movement. We do this exposition from a Catholic background and hence it will have a Catholic perspective. First, we shall present a short exposition of the Christian understanding of God and cosmos. It will be followed by an exposition on the Christian vision of human beings with their relation to family and society. Finally, we shall present the Christian understanding of spirituality, including the role played by the Bible and sacraments.

4.6.2.1. The Concept of God

Christians consider God as the source and end of all forms of life, all types of matter, and all kinds of thought, but at the same time, composed of none of these materials. For Christians, God, who is the creator of heaven and earth, is the only one God who is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. The stress on monotheism was inherited from Judaism, but in Christianity, this one Godhead is understood as being a community of three persons, namely, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When Christians speak of God as a person, they mean that it is possible to enter into a personal relationship with God. This Trinitarian God is the creator and sustainer of the universe and source of all knowledge and wisdom⁸¹⁷. He is related to creation, on the one hand, as transcendent and, therefore, he is not identified with it; on the other hand, he is related to creation as immanent and, thus, he is still involved with it and working within it⁸¹⁸. Christians understand this God as easily accessible and compassionate. In general, Christians explain God's nature as "love" or rather God as "love".

Jesus Christ is the historical point of departure for Christianity, a historical religion which came into being in response to a specific set of events which centre upon Jesus Christ⁸¹⁹. Christians believe that the second person of the Trinity became man, and was born of Mary and lived on earth as Jesus Christ in whom the nature of God and nature of human being were united in one person⁸²⁰. Christians believe that Jesus Christ manifested God's saving presence and God's love through a life of solidarity with the despised and the lowly and by his activities of kindness to all. He has revealed God as the Father and Himself as the Son⁸²¹.

817 R.P.VANDE KAPPELLE & J.D. CURRID, 'The Old Testament. The Covenant between God and Man', in W.A. HOFFECKER & G.S. SMITH (eds.), *Building a Christian World View. God, Man and Knowledge*, New Jersey, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1986, p. 14.

818 *Ibid.* p. 15.

819 MCGRATH, *Christian Theology*, p. 274.

820 M. WALSH, *Roman Catholicism. The Basics*, London/New York, Routledge, 2005, p. 3. See also G.K. BAELE & J. BIBZA, 'The New Testament. The Covenant of Redemption in Jesus Christ', in W.A. HOFFECKER & G.S. SMITH (eds.), *Building a Christian World View*, p. 69.

821 L. WOODHEAD, 'Christianity', in L. WOODHEAD, P. FLETCHER, H. KAWANAMI & D. SMITH (eds.), *Religions in the Modern World*, London/New York, Routledge, 2002, p. 155.

Through his life, death on the cross, and resurrection, Jesus brought back to God the humanity which had alienated itself from God⁸²².

Christians believe that after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, descended on the community of the disciples gathered around the Apostles and Mary the Mother of Jesus. This event marks the beginning of the Church. They believe that the Holy Spirit is continuing to guide the believers in this world⁸²³. Belief in God as Holy Spirit gives expression to the conviction that God has not left the world unattended but is continually and dynamically active with the world of his creation⁸²⁴.

4.6.2.2. The Vision of the Cosmos

The Christian worldview is a linear and historical one, with one world, one creation, one life, etc. It considers the cosmos as created only once and which will have an end. According to Christian teaching, God created everything out of nothing. Creation implies that there is a distinction between God and creation. It also implies the final authority of God over created things. Christians regard the creation of the world as the result of the spontaneous overflow of God's goodness and love. Moreover, since the world is created by God, it is good. The Christian concept of the world is thoroughly religious, a concept of faith that is correlated with the concept of God⁸²⁵. It follows a spiritual principle and hence it need not be scientifically precise nor follow natural science. Christianity holds that cosmos and humankind will find their accomplishment in God.

The Christian imagination identifies at least three realms in the cosmos as heaven, earth, and hell. Heaven and hell are not described as physical places but as states of being of a spirit or human soul. We shall speak more about this when we discuss human beings in the following section. Earth is the place where human beings are physically living. However, they regard this realm to be temporary. On the day of the last judgement, all the people will be judged, the earth will be swept away, and the Kingdom of God will be ushered in.

822 WALSH, *Roman Catholicism*, p. 3.

823 The Pentecostal Christians and other Christians who have a charismatic orientation give the Holy Spirit more importance in their spirituality. The ideas of baptism in the Spirit, possession by the Holy Spirit, charismatic gifts, healing power, speaking in tongues, miracles, etc. are commonly seen in such churches and groups. See for the details, W.K. KAYE & A.E. DYER, *Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies. A Reader*, London, SCM Press, 2004.

824 M. WILES, 'What Christians Believe', in J. MCMANNERS (ed.), *The Oxford History of Christianity*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 575.

825 E. TROELTSCH, *The Christian Faith*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1991, p. 196.

4.6.2.3. The Vision of Human Beings

According to the Christian understanding, human beings enjoy a higher dignity than any other created beings in the cosmos since they are created by God in His own image and likeness. Humanity, as created in the image of God, is widely regarded as establishing the original uprightness and dignity of human nature⁸²⁶. Being created in the image of God shows the origin of the soul, and it also implies the idea of a goal. The story of the creation of human beings as presented in the Bible depicts the human person as the image of God, and as unique in creation. It presents the spiritual and material worlds united in the human person in a unique way⁸²⁷. The human being is both body and soul and the link between them is extremely intimate, so that there is no dualism⁸²⁸. “A special place in creation has been given to the human person whom God set over this world to develop it in a spirit of stewardship”⁸²⁹. At the time of creation, human beings were in perfect relation with God.

Although human beings were created in perfect relationship with God, this relationship with God was damaged with what Christians call the “fall” of Adam, the first human being. This is regarded as the result of the disobedience of human beings to the will of the creator. “Sin is disobedience towards God, lack of trust in his goodness and an abuse of that freedom which God gives to created persons so that they are capable of loving him and loving one another. The whole of the human race is implicated in the sin of Adam which brings death as its fruit”⁸³⁰. Consequently, the image of God in human nature has been defaced and disfigured and all humanity shares in this defacement⁸³¹. However, God does not abandon sinful humanity to the power of death. God sends forth his Son, Jesus Christ, to save this fallen human race. He is truly man without ceasing to be truly God. His passion, death on the cross, and his resurrection are the true means of salvation. Thus, God has acted to restore and to return to human beings their original dignity through the actions of Jesus Christ⁸³². Therefore, Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the only means by which sin and sinful states can be overcome and humanity can be reconciled to God, attaining salvation⁸³³.

Christians believe that the life of human beings does not end here on earth but continues after physical death. They believe that those who die in God’s friendship will enter into God’s presence, seeing him “face to face”. “This blessed state

826 MCGRATH, *Christian Theology*, p. 370.

827 M.A. O’NEILL, ‘Creation and Anthropology’, in J.J. BUCKLEY, F.C. BAUERSCHMIDT, & T. POMPLUN (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Catholicism*, Malden/Oxford, Blackwell Publishing 2007, p. 286.

828 KAPPELLE & CURRID, ‘The Old Testament’, p. 23.

829 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Journeying Together*, p. 107.

830 *Ibid.* p. 107

831 This is how St. Cyril of Jerusalem explains the situation. See MCGRATH, *Christian Theology*, p. 370.

832 T. HOPKO, ‘Trinity in the Cappadocians’, in B. MCGINN & J. MEYENDORFF (eds.), *Christian Spirituality. Origins to the Twelfth Century*, New York, Crossroad, 1988, p. 271.

833 J.R. ADAIR, *Introducing Christianity*, New York/London, Routledge, 2008, p. 10.

is called 'heaven'. If at the time of death some imperfections remain which tarnish the friendship with God, the person will undergo purification so as to achieve the holiness required to be in the presence of God"⁸³⁴. The final purification is known as "purgatory". Those who die in a state of enmity with God, unrepentant, refusing to accept His merciful love, will remain separated from Him forever. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God is what Christians mean by "hell"⁸³⁵.

Christians understand human beings as having only one life here on earth. Everyone, without exception, male and female, rich and poor, white or black, all have an equal dignity as created in the image of God. Christianity teaches that man and woman are created in perfect equality as human persons and complementary as masculine and feminine⁸³⁶. There is no hierarchy among human beings based on their origin. All of them are destined to heaven. Depending on his/her life on earth one can achieve heaven or fail to achieve it.

Christianity stresses communion and communitarian values. As we have seen, the idea of human beings created in the image of God and that God is envisioned as a trinity implies that human beings are not created as islands but are called into communion. The Catholic Church sees the family as the basic community united in faith. The family is sometimes called "a domestic church"⁸³⁷. The faith of the individual is primarily nurtured in the family within the larger context of the parish community. It is seen as the basis both for the church and for the society. A family exists for the good of the partners in marriage, for the procreation and education of children, and to provide them with a stable environment in which to grow up⁸³⁸. It is also the duty of humankind to be the stewards of the sub-human creation, and to look after the welfare of the world⁸³⁹.

4.6.2.4. The View on Spiritual Life

Christian spirituality consists of a set of beliefs, a set of values, and a way of life⁸⁴⁰. The set of beliefs is contained in the Creed, which the Christians profess. The set of values is what is called the Christian values, namely, the willingness to deny oneself and to live for others, etc., which are the result of a belief in Christ. The Christian way of life refers to the fact that the faith has to be expressed with true sincerity. That way of life is a life of love of God and love of neighbour, which forms the essence of Christian life. Christians consider both these as two

834 *Ibid.* pp. 109-110.

835 *Ibid.* p. 110.

836 A. NICHOLS, *The Splendour of Doctrine. The Catechism of the Catholic Church on Christian Believing*, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1995, p. 45.

837 L.S. CUNNINGHAM, *An Introduction to Catholicism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 118.

838 WALSH, *Roman Catholicism*, p. 147.

839 NICHOLS, *The Splendour of Doctrine*, p. 45.

840 A.E. MCGRATH, *Christian Spirituality*, Oxford/Malden, Blackwell Publishers, 1999, p. 3.

sides of the same coin. Love of God is to be expressed in the love of their neighbours, namely, through charity, i.e., do for others what you would want them to do for you⁸⁴¹. Christians acknowledge Christ and his life as the example of the ideal relationship to God and to other people, and their spiritual life as an attempt to imitate this relationship⁸⁴².

Prayer is an important feature of Christian spirituality. Prayers help Christians in their effort to follow Jesus. They distinguish between the private prayers of the individuals and the public prayer of the church⁸⁴³. Christians around the world gather for the public community worship called Eucharist on Sundays⁸⁴⁴. In the Eucharist, Christians recall the story of Jesus and re-enact the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus in a ritual form and celebrate its implications for their lives⁸⁴⁵. They regard Sunday as the first day of the week, as the day on which Jesus rose again from the dead, as the day of God's new creation and therefore a day appropriate for public Christian worship⁸⁴⁶. Although worship can be done individually, it is usually done in a group setting often following a set order known as the liturgy.

All Christians are encouraged to pray morning and evening as well as before and after meals. "Prayer presupposes that what is verbalized in a personal or ritual prayer is meaningful and an important expression of one's existence or human life"⁸⁴⁷. There is a wide variety of different forms of prayers used by Christians⁸⁴⁸. The rosary, which is recited individually or collectively, is one of the most popular forms of prayer used by the Catholics. Other prayers include the Lord's Prayer, intercessions, praise, thanksgiving, and petitions. Every year a noteworthy number of Christians spend time in retreat to renew their lives. Contemplation and meditation on the Word of God, reciting the Stations of the Cross, seeking intercession of saints and pilgrimages to shrines, etc. are also Catholic practices.

Several Christians use the charismatic form of prayer in their spiritual life. The charismatic style gives importance to singing of hymns, reciting of prayers, praising and worshipping, etc., all in a loud voice. They also give importance to "showering of Holy Spirit", "miracles", "cures" and "witness" in their prayers

841 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Journeying Together*, p. 111.

842 MCGRATH, *Christian Theology*, p. 340.

843 MCGRATH, *An Introduction to Christianity*, p. 361.

844 However it also referred to as Holy Mass, Lord's Supper, Divine Liturgy, Holy Communion etc.,

845 WALSH, *Roman Catholicism*, p. 111. See also MCGRATH, *Christian Spirituality*, p. 119.

846 J. McMANNERS, 'Introduction', in J. McMANNERS (ed.), *The Oxford History of Christianity*, p. 84. See also MCGRATH, *An Introduction to Christianity*, p. 360.

847 U. LUZ, 'Why do Theologians Speak about God when they Speak about Humans?', in T. NICKLAS & K. ZAMFIR (eds.), *Theologies of Creation in Early Judaism and Ancient Christianity*, Berlin/New York, De Gruyter, 2010, p. 9.

848 The liturgy of the hours or "the divine office" which includes Psalms, Scripture readings, etc., is an Official Prayer of the church. This form of prayer is meant to be said in common and at particular hours of the day and is mostly said by the priests, monks, and nuns. See for details, WALSH, *Roman Catholicism*, p. 126.

and spirituality. The focus of charismatic worship is both the worship of God and on the experience of the presence of the Lord⁸⁴⁹.

Christianity as a way of life has structured the various aspects of Christian faith into a yearly pattern⁸⁵⁰. The whole year is structured in such a way that the life of a Christian revolves around the life of Christ⁸⁵¹. Advent is the first season of the year, which is a preparatory period for Christmas, during which the background of the coming of Jesus is recalled, when Christians prepare themselves to receive Jesus into their hearts⁸⁵². Christmas is celebrated as the birthday of Jesus Christ, and the season of Christmas lasts until the feast of the Baptism of Jesus, which is followed by a few weeks of “ordinary time”. Lent season begins with Ash Wednesday and is considered as a time of preparation for Easter, the most important feast for Christians, and a time set apart for special fasting and penitence. Easter, the feast of the Resurrection of Jesus is the most important and foremost feast of the year. It is preceded by a Holy Week in which Christ’s sufferings and death on the cross are recalled in a special way. Pentecost, 50 days after the Easter, celebrates the gift of the Holy Spirit to the first disciples of Jesus and the birth of the Church. The period after Pentecost until Advent is usually called the “ordinary time” of the year.

Spiritual life for Christians means becoming a disciple of Christ and following him. Although one becomes a Christian, a member of the church, through faith and baptism, “to be a true disciple requires a personal decision to adhere to Christ and to imitate him as the supreme way, the truth and the life”⁸⁵³. All the prayers are therefore meant to bring Christians closer to Christ. The meaning of spiritual life is achieving the right relationship with God and with one another as showed by Jesus, namely, seeing God as the Father and all human beings as brothers and sisters. They believe that their prayers and spirituality should enable them to love even their enemies following the example of Jesus. Hence, spiritual-

849 HOCKEN, *The Challenges of the Pentecostal, Charismatic and Messianic Jewish Movements*, p. 83.

850 MCGRATH, *In Introduction to Christianity*, p. 374.

851 There is difference in the structure of the yearly cycle for different churches. All the churches follow, with certain variations in an yearly pattern based on life of Christ.

852 MCGRATH, *Christian Spirituality*, p. 126.

853 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Journeying Together*, p. 110. From the 3rd century onwards many Christians left to the deserts to lead a life of asceticism and practiced strict spiritual disciplines such as silence, solitude, fasting, celibacy and voluntary poverty as means of self-emptying. Catholic and Orthodox Churches have fostered the asceticism and encouraged the vocation of those who have dedicated their lives to the pursuit of intimacy with God in a radical way. The vast number of monastic or religious orders meant for both men and women, where a life of contemplation and action is followed is an option for those who want to live a more intimate relationship with God. See for details, J.A. DINOIA, ‘The Practice of Catholic Theology’, in J.J. BUCKLEY, F.C. BEUERSCHMIDT & T. POMPLUN (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Catholicism*, 2007, pp. 390-391, and S. GILLEY, ‘Holiness in the Roman Catholic Tradition’, in S.C. BARTON, *Holiness. Past and Present*, London/New York, T&T Clark, 2003, pp. 316-338. The ascending stages of spiritual life have been described in the Christian circle as purgative, illuminative and unitive. See also the description of the *Interior Castle* the classic exposition of St. Teresa of Avila on the mystical journey of soul to God in which she explains the seven mansions of spiritual life. See for details, K.J. COLLINS, *Exploring Christian Spirituality. An Ecumenical Reader*, Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 2000, p. 118, & 102-103.

ity is more than reciting prayers. On the one hand, it has the aspect of prayer, asceticism, and devotional practices, but, on the other hand, the moral and social aspect of spirituality is also very much stressed. Therefore, struggle and quest for social justice, solidarity with the marginalized, and works of mercy are considered as means of opening oneself to the Spirit of God and thus as a constituent part of spiritual life⁸⁵⁴.

4.6.2.5. The Role of the Bible

The Bible is the most important and sacred text for Christians. It is so central to Christians that it is read in most of the Christian services of worship. Sermons are preached on biblical passages in all such services, small groups gather to study the Bible, many Christians begin their day by reading the Bible or listening to passages from the Bible, monks and nuns read it for their meditations, and passages are quoted in most of the prayers, etc⁸⁵⁵. The Bible is divided into two major sections, namely, the Old Testament and the New Testament. Christians believe that the contents of the Old Testament belong to a period of God's dealing with the world, which has in some way been superseded by the coming of Christ, which the New Testament bears witness to and attests⁸⁵⁶. The first four books of the New Testament are known as the Gospels, which portray the birth, teaching, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Christians consider the Gospels as the most important part of the Bible.

4.6.2.6. The Role of Sacraments

The Catholic Church understands sacraments as efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament⁸⁵⁷. For the Catholic and Orthodox churches, there are seven sacraments⁸⁵⁸ through which divine grace is transmitted in a mystical way to worshippers⁸⁵⁹. The sacrament of Baptism is the first step in a lifelong journey of discipleship and commitment to Christ. At baptism, the adult individual makes a decisive choice to follow Christ⁸⁶⁰. Through baptism, one is baptised into the death of Christ so that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, he/she too may live a new life⁸⁶¹. At the same

854 W.M. WRIGHT, 'Spirituality', *The Blackwell Companion to Catholicism*, in J.J. BUCKLEY, F.C. BAUERSCHMIDT, & T. POMPLUN (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Catholicism*, 2011, pp. 401-402.

855 MCGRATH, *An Introduction to Christianity*, p. 5.

856 *Ibid.* p. 9.

857 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1131.

858 They are Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony.

859 ADAIR, *Introducing Christianity*, p. 34.

860 When infant baptism is practiced, the parents and godparents commit to bring the child up in Christian faith.

861 Romans 6,4.

time, one is initiated into Christian life and made a member of the visible body of Christ, the Church. Those who are baptised as infants need to become more aware of the gift of the Holy Spirit they have received⁸⁶². This is brought about through the sacrament of Confirmation, which enables the baptised persons to arrive at spiritual maturity and full commitment as Christians⁸⁶³. The Eucharist is the summit and permanent source of all Christian life. It is both a sacrifice and a meal. By receiving the Body and Blood of Christ at a Eucharistic celebration, Catholics believe that they are spiritually nourished and brought closer to God⁸⁶⁴. God's unconditional forgiveness is achieved in the sacrament of Reconciliation. Through this sacrament, one is re-integrated both to God and to the community⁸⁶⁵. It is done in the sincere confession of one's sins to the priest who is the representative of God's goodness and grace⁸⁶⁶. Some members of the church are chosen and set apart for special offices in the church generally termed as the ministerial priesthood⁸⁶⁷. They are the Bishops, Priests, and Deacons. Bishops confer the sacrament of Holy Orders on them. The Catholic Church holds the sacrament of Marriage as a covenant between spouses that reflects the covenant between God and humanity. Christian couples find grace that sanctifies their union in the sacrament of marriage, which, for Catholics, is indissoluble. In times of sickness, healing and consolation both for body and soul are brought to the sick and ailing by the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick⁸⁶⁸.

The numbers, understanding, and naming of the sacraments vary according to the denominations. Most Protestant Churches consider baptism and the Lord's Supper as the two sacraments.

4.6.3. *The Interpretation of the Religious Practices of the Khrist Bhaktas at Home*

In order to gain a better grasp of the elements behind the expressions, we have divided the religious practices of the devotees into two conglomerations, namely, those expressions that devotees originally possessed before they became *Khrist Bhaktas*, and those expressions which the devotees acquired as a result of their association with the Matridham *āśram*.

3.6.3.1. The First Conglomeration of Expressions: Before Acquaintance with the *Āśram*

The first conglomeration of the expressions include lighting the lamp, wearing sacred objects, displaying religious symbols and pictures at home, performing

862 L.E. MICK, *Understanding the Sacraments Today*, Minnesota, The Liturgical Press, 2006, p. 25.

863 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Journeying Together*, p. 113.

864 *Ibid.* p. 113.

865 MICK, *Understanding the Sacraments Today*, p. 68.

866 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Journeying Together*, p.113.

867 J. MACQUARRIE, *A Guide to the Sacraments*, London, SCM Press, 1977, p. 168.

868 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Journeying Together*, p. 113.

ārtī, singing of *bhajans* (though not practiced earlier in the context of family prayer), taking home blessed water, oil, and *prasād*. Before becoming the devotees of Christ, the devotees performed all these actions as part of their religious practices with regard to their devotion to Hindu gods. These expressions then followed a Hindu framework. Now the devotees perform all these actions sometimes with slight modifications, in honour of Jesus Christ and as the result of their devotion and commitment to Him. None of these actions is introduced to the devotees by the leaders of the *āśram* but come to them naturally and spontaneously.

Now, are the devotees using Hindu elements within a Christian framework or are they using Christian elements in a Hindu framework? Concretely, does it mean that Jesus is incorporated into the Hindu framework? Alternatively, is it the case that the elements and their meaning remain both within the Hindu and Christian frameworks?

In answering these questions, it is important to understand whether, first of all, the elements belong exclusively to a Hindu framework, or whether they portray exclusively a Christian framework. Or do these elements fit into both Hindu and Christian frameworks? Therefore, first, we shall analyse each of these expressions to see if the *ideational* elements in these expressions were in fact belonging to a Hindu or a Christian framework, or could both fit within a Christian or Hindu framework.

The first expression we shall examine is the lighting of the lamp daily in the morning and in the evening in front of the picture of Jesus or at the beginning of the village prayer meeting. The family prayer invariably begins with lighting of the *dīyā*/oil lamp. Even when there is no family prayer in the morning or when it is missed, the devotees, especially the women, light the lamp without fail daily in front of the picture of Jesus.

Lighting a lamp in front of the deity is seen in both Hinduism and Christianity. Looking from a Hindu perspective it is typically a way of devotion and an expression of religious commitment. The very act of lighting the lamp is central to prayer (no prayer without or until the light is lit). It is considered as an auspicious act that brings prosperity, good health, and other blessings from the deity⁸⁶⁹. Therefore, the Hindus light a lamp in front of the deity without fail. Some leave it lit for whole day. It is also a way of showing respect to the deity and regarded as giving light to the deity at least when the image is considered a king⁸⁷⁰. Looking from the Christian perspective this is also an act of devotion. For Christians, the lighting of the lamp is definitely an act of private devotion but is not central to their devotional life. The lighting of the candle, together with prayer, may become important for personal spiritual life.

869 Light symbolizing knowledge as it removes darkness which is symbolic of ignorance.

870 Some give more importance to the symbolic meaning, i.e., just as light removes the darkness, God who is the light shall remove the darkness of ignorance.

When *Khrist Bhaktas* light *dīyā* in front of the picture of Jesus, is it the Hindu framework, which is operative, or does it function within a Christian framework? How important is this ritual for a devotee in his/her personal and family prayer? Can we detect any signs of a gradual change in the meaning of this ritual or a change from the Hindu framework to the Christian framework? Is the change limited to changing the picture of a Hindu god to a picture of Jesus? Is the change on a deeper level or peripheral? When we excogitate the practice of giving emphasis on the lighting of *dīyā* as a regular form of devotion and the way it is taken seriously by majority of the devotees, we can say that it resembles more or less a Hindu framework. Looked at from outside, we do not see any signs of change in the mindset from Hindu to Christian. The practice of lighting *dīyā* in front of the picture of Jesus without having a vocal prayer, in other words, lighting itself as a form of prayer, indicates a Hindu framework. Moreover, it is true that the symbols and ritual do not change their meaning overnight. “Symbols, even when lifted from their original matrix, continue to evoke that matrix and to make its power present among those who interact with the symbols”⁸⁷¹.

The next expression of the devotees at home is the act of keeping the sacred pictures (of Jesus, Mary, Holy Family, etc.) in a prominent place and wearing religious symbols such as a cross, rosary, etc. These are signs of the declaration of the religious affiliation or faith. Both Christians and Hindus do keep sacred pictures at home, although normally Hindus have their own family god and, therefore are not circumspect about keeping the pictures of Hindu gods in a prominent place. Similarly, both Christians and Hindus do wear either the rosary or a sacred thread around their neck. Thus, keeping the picture or wearing the rosary in itself does not speak of a specific framework. This seems to be an element used in both Hindu and Christian worldviews. Looking at these expressions from both Hindu and Christian perspectives, it has the same function. Though this expression sounds very marginal, as a *performantial* element, this has much more extensive significance in the context of north India. We have already seen (2.1.2) that Christians in India are hated and seen as Westerners and foreigners. They are looked down upon and considered culturally low, alien, and sometimes even as a threat to the nation's unity. In such a context, to display the picture of Jesus, to wear the cross, to visit the Christian *āśram*, and join in the Christian prayer is itself a bold declaration of the faith in Jesus. “The acts performed during a rite regularly appear to demand a commitment from the actor, even when the actor does not understand them. For this reason, these acts become the screen upon which a number of different, even contradictory meanings may be projected”⁸⁷². Therefore, this action shows a deeper commitment to Christ and could be taken as a sign of change from one religious domain (Hindu) to the other (Christian).

871 N. MITCHELL, *Cult and Controversy. The Worship of the Eucharist outside Mass*, New York, Pueblo Publishing Company, 1982, p. 256.

872 C. SEVERI, ‘Memory, Reflexivity and Belief. Reflections on the Ritual Use of Language’, in G. HARVEY (ed.), *Ritual and Religious Belief*, p. 223.

The *ārtī* performed at the end of every prayer meeting, whether at home or in the village, shall be investigated now. Performing an *ārtī* in front of the deity is a Hindu custom. Looking at it from a Hindu perspective, it is an important part of worship, and a way of giving honour. Performing the *ārtī* in front of the statue gives a better vision of the deity, and the *darśan* of the deity is the most important aspect of Hindu worship⁸⁷³. Hindus want to see their deities and they want to be seen by them⁸⁷⁴. Though *ārtī* has been inducted to the inculturated Catholic liturgy, having an *ārtī* in the context of a family prayer is not practiced by Christians. Looking at it from a Christian perspective, it is a way of giving respect to Jesus. Although originally an element displaying a Hindu framework, it has been appropriated to Christian practices. This is thus an example of the mutual influence and borrowing of elements from Hinduism to Christianity. For our purpose, however, can we say that a Hindu framework is operative behind the performance of the *ārtī* or that there is a change in favour of a Christian framework? Based on the principle that a series of interlocking signs held together by a set of codes gives the same message, we can make up our mind. Deliberating on the regularity and importance given to the *ārtī* and taking into consideration the whole atmosphere and style of singing with clapping of hands, together with the tradition of joining *ārtī* in the Hindu temples, this element continues to operate in a Hindu framework.

The next expression we inspect is the singing of *bhajans* at home and in the village prayer meeting. From a Hindu perspective, singing *bhajans* is a usual form of expression of piety. Many Hindu *bhakti* poets went round the villages singing praises to God. The Hindus gather in the temple or village occasionally for what is called *bhajan maṇḍlī*, which means a circle or a group coming together and singing the praises of the Lord for spiritual nourishment. This *bhajan maṇḍlī* lasts for several hours and sometimes runs throughout the night. Christians all over the world use hymns in their worship. They believe in the old dictum that says, one who sings prays twice⁸⁷⁵. The charismatic Catholics in India clap their hands and play tambourine or *kartāl* while singing. However, singing of *bhajans* in the context of a family prayer is not common to Catholics. Catholics in India sing normally just one hymn either at the beginning or at the end of the family prayer. The *Khrīst Bhaktas* spend a long time singing many *bhajans*, which they seem to cherish. Though the singing of *bhajans* and hymns is practiced in Christianity, the style of singing many *bhajans* one after the other, using *kartāl*, bells, and clapping hands, etc., as practiced by the *Bhaktas* displays an element belonging predominantly to a Hindu framework. However since the content of the singing is Christian, although the form of expression has not changed,

873 See the framework illustrated earlier.

874 L.A. BOBB, 'Glancing. Visual Interaction in Hinduism', in *Journal of Anthropological Research* 37, 1981, 4, p. 387.

875 Traditionally attributed to St. Augustine of Hippo.

over a long period of time the possibility of change in favour of a Christian framework cannot be ruled out.

The next expression is taking the blessed water and oil home. The practice of taking holy water home and using it for several purposes is common to Hindus and Christians. Most churches keep holy water at the entrance of the church and people dip their hand in it to make the sign of cross. Holy water is used for various kinds of blessings. Catholics carry home the water blessed at Easter vigil. In Hinduism, the water from the Ganges is considered holy and it is preserved in the home. Hindus believe that giving water from the Ganges to the dying is helpful for their salvation. They also believe that keeping the water from the Ganges is auspicious as well as a help for washing away sins. Thus, using holy water is common to both Hinduism and Christianity. This element is used in both the Hindu and Christian frameworks. The custom of taking blessed oil is not practiced among Christians in India, but the anointing with oil is a custom familiar to the biblical world⁸⁷⁶. Although the custom of using blessed oil is not common in Hinduism, the rural folk touch the oil from the lamp in the temple and apply it to their body as medicine against ailments and aches. Considering the use of the holy water and blessed oil on livestock, crops, etc., and the large number of devotees taking it home regularly, a slighter leaning towards the Hindu framework is seen in this expression⁸⁷⁷.

We shall investigate the expression of carrying home the *prasād* from the prayer meeting in the *āśram*. Our research has found that the *children consume the prasād* immediately. The adults consume a part of the *prasād* given at the village prayer meeting and the rest is taken home to be shared with others. The *prasād* (the bun) distributed at *āśram* is mostly taken home, although some consume it in the *āśram* itself. The *prasād* taken home is distributed to all the members of the family and shared with those neighbouring devotees who were not able or allowed to go to *āśram*. It is even shared with any person, no matter whether one is a devotee or not. Looking at it from a Hindu perspective, giving *prasād* to any person is a normal practice. What Christians have, though not the same but similar, is the Holy Communion, which is called *param prasād* (supreme *prasād*). Holy Communion is not taken home or distributed to everyone. There are strict rules concerning the distribution of the Communion. The *Khrist Bhaktas* are not given Holy Communion but *prasād* similar to what they receive from any temple⁸⁷⁸. Taking into consideration the way the devotees treat the *prasād*, it presents a Hindu framework. At the same time, the devotees do desire to receive the Holy Communion, but the very idea of Holy Communion and

876 The custom of anointing with oil for curing the diseases is an old custom of the people in the New Testament times as seen in the Gospels, e.g., Mark 6,13.

877 Since the religion practised in rural areas is overwhelmed by the faith in the existence of evil, the oil and water from the *āśram* are powerful weapons for the devotees. Therefore, the elements display more or less a rural religious framework.

878 The practice of giving the blessed but not consecrated bread to non-communicants in the Eastern Christianity has some similarity.

prasād have different meanings. We shall take up that discussion in the next chapter.

From the above analysis of faith practices of devotees at home and in the villages, it is clear that these elements exhibit mostly a Hindu framework although some elements, namely, *ārtī*, lighting of the lamp at Eucharist or any important occasions, and singing of *bhajans* are appropriated into the Christian framework as well. They are the external expressions of the internal faith commitment. Even when the faith is changed, the symbols and expressions remain more or less the same, because the symbols do not change their meaning overnight. However, with the change of faith there is the possibility of ushering in a beginning of a change with regard to the meaning of symbols and expressions. As we have seen earlier, the symbols continue to generate the original imprint in the minds of the practitioners even in a changed context. Does that mean that the devotees are adopting Christian elements to their worldview? Alternatively, are they changing their worldview into a Christian worldview? Before making any judgemental remarks we need to see their other religious practices and cultural expressions.

4.6.3.2. The Second Conglomeration of Expressions: After Acquaintance with the *Āśram*

The second conglomeration of expressions are the family prayer in the morning and evening, and the prayer meeting in the village, the intercessory prayer, praise and worship, praying the Rosary, and reading from the Bible. These expressions are the result of the association of the devotees with the *āśram*. We are looking at these expressions to find out the *ideational* elements underlying them. It is possible that the elements exhibit both a Hindu and Christian framework. Can we also find changes from one framework to the other as a consequence of the use of these elements? In order to elucidate our enquiry, we will investigate each of these *material* elements and their *performantial* aspects, and trace the framework behind them.

The first faith expression is the ritual of family prayer. Having a prayer in the evening and sometimes in the morning at home in itself does not say anything specific about whether it indicates a Hindu or Christian framework. However, having a prayer in the context of a family is clearly Christian. The communal aspect of Christianity is reflected in the context of family prayer. Closely related is the village prayer meeting conducted normally at the house of an *aguā*. We have noted that in the Hindu framework, one approaches the divine individually even when a community is present. The liberation of each soul from *samsārā* has to be worked out individually, and no other person can share this task. Christianity is a community religion that stresses community prayer and family relationship. In the Christian worldview, relationships with one another and with God are taken simultaneously. A good relation with one another is an attestation of a good relation with God, and vice versa. Having listened to and been inspired by

the preaching at the *āśram* about the importance of family life, when devotees come together for the family prayer and village prayer this element becomes at the same time a material element and a *performantial* element depicting the *ideational* element of the Christian framework. Therefore, it can be inferred that the process of having a prayer either in the context of the family, or the village, presupposes the Christian framework.

Do the devotees adopt this aspect of family prayer into the Hindu framework or are they changing their framework and accepting the Christian worldview? It may not be proper for us to make an absolute judgement about it right away. We have seen that on the outside there is a noticeable change of their coming together and praying together. Such a shift is seen outwardly from an individual-oriented approach to the community-oriented approach. We also need to look at the content of the prayer to see if it also reflects the same tendency.

The content of family and village prayer is explained earlier (4.1.2). One of the most important contents of the prayer meeting is the intercessory prayer. The idea of intercession is absent in the Hindu framework. Each soul has to bear the fruits of its own actions. Christians, however, believe in the role of intercession. For them, Christ is the mediator par excellence. He is invoked in almost all the prayers. Moreover, intercessory prayers are made vocally, which again points to the communal dimension of the prayer. This type of vocal prayer is something new to the devotees and they intercede for various intentions, needs, blessings, cures, etc., and pray for several people and nations. As practiced by the devotees, the intercessions are longer and central in their prayer. Therefore, we could assume that the level of content also slants towards the Christian worldview.

Praising and worshipping in a loud voice is a part of the prayer used at home and in the village prayer meetings. It follows a charismatic style with lots of shouting of alleluia. The devotees praise God the Father for his creation, God the Son for his redemption and the Holy Spirit for the work of sanctification. The praising and worshiping in loud voice is not a common practice among Hindus in India⁸⁷⁹. Hindus in general prefer silence as a spiritual means of controlling of the mind and body in order to awaken the inner spirit. It is true that Christians are also acquainted with silence and meditation. The life of monks and nuns in the monasteries and convents bear witness to this practice. But, Christians are used to vocal prayer. In any case, the method of praise and worship in a loud voice is not from a Hindu framework. This type of praise and worship comes from the Christian charismatic circle. Therefore, we could say that in vocal prayer we can observe a slow movement towards a Christian framework.

Another content in the evening prayer is the Rosary. Catholics have a special place for Mary in their spiritual life. They consider her intercession important for

879 The *Hare Krishna* (Kṛṣṇ) movement has something similar in their singing of the name of Kṛṣṇ, while going around the streets.

their lives here on earth as well as their efforts to reach heaven. Therefore, the Rosary is a form of devotion to Mary through which her intercession is invoked. Devotion to a mother goddess is important for Hindus and the Devi tradition is very strong in India. “Those who worship Devi regard her as the supreme goddess who is subordinate to none and to whom all gods are subordinate”⁸⁸⁰. People from villages have a special devotion to Devi in her manifold forms such as Durga, Kālī, Lakṣmī, etc. Therefore, we can say that the devotion of mother is present in both Hinduism and Christianity. The form and content of expression are different in both cases. Christians consider Mary as mother of Jesus while the Hindus consider Devi as goddess and Mother. Using the Rosary is a Christian framework but devotion to mother is not anything new or different to the Hindu devotees. We should also note that Hindus recite the name of their *iṣṭdevātā* (favourite God) using beads. Therefore, we can say that behind the Rosary there is predominantly a Christian framework, but behind the devotion to mother there is more or less a Hindu framework. In the element of devotion to Mary as practiced by the *Khrist Bhaktas* both Hindu and the Christian frameworks are manifested. However, even where there is a mixture, can we say that one element is slowly overcoming the other and replacing it? Is Mary taking up the role of a mother goddess, or is her role as subordinate to Jesus gaining prominence? In order to make a better assessment we need to look at their devotional practices at the *āśram*, especially at the grotto and the church, which we will take up later.

The last item for our discussion on the second conglomeration is reading from the Bible. We have seen that sometimes reading from the Bible is also included in the family prayer. Some families like that of Shanta Prasad spend hours reading the Bible. Reading the Holy Books in the context of prayer is seen in both Christianity and Hinduism. Catholics stimulated the practice of reading Bible for the faithful after the Second Vatican Council. In Hinduism, it is a custom for some individuals, especially the elderly, to read Rāmāyaṇ, Mahābhārat or any of the scriptures for a considerably long time, as part of their devotion. They do it to infuse the atmosphere with the presence of God. In Christianity, the readings are intended for the listener to hear the Word of God, reflect upon it, and take inspiration for leading a holier life. We could presume that here both a Christian and a Hindu framework are operative. When the reading is short and made use for reflective purpose, and not for infusing the atmosphere with sacredness, it is dominantly Christian, while when the reading is longer and not meant for the reader and listeners, it displays a Hindu framework. At the same time, considering the low number of people who read the Bible at family prayer, and even more the meagre numbers who read it for longer hours, we can infer it to be a dominantly Christian framework.

We have also seen that people like Rajeshwaree (*kallu mā*) keep the Bible covered in a saffron cloth. Both Christians and Hindus keep the Holy Books safe,

880 A. SHARMA, *Classical Hindu Thought*, p. 21.

but covering it in saffron cloth is typically an element belonging to the Hindu framework. For the Hindus saffron is a holy colour. It is not normal for them to own a copy and place it at home, although some of them do obtain copies and read it in the evenings. Whereas the Christians in general do keep a copy of the Bible at home and many read it at the time of prayer. The Hindu devotees, even the illiterate, are in possession of the copy of the Bible. Considering the sparse number of the devotees keeping the Bible in a saffron cover and the greater number of devotees possessing the Bible, it can be seen that the Christian framework lies behind this expression. Can we see a change in the mindset of the devotees concerning the attitude towards the Bible? Or are both the Christian and the Hindu mindsets at work? From the outside, we see a large number of devotees possessing the Bible, many of them reading it at prayer, and a good number quoting passages from the Bible at prayers. Therefore, it seems there is a shift towards a Christian attitude towards the Scripture.

From the above analysis of the second conglomeration of the religious practices of the devotees, it is clear that there are both Hindu and Christian worldviews behind these expressions. At the same time, we have noticed a tendency of slight impulsion from a Hindu worldview towards the Christian worldview, at least in some expressions. We can confirm this change only after analysing the complete set of practices. Therefore, we shall assess their other devotional practices in the *āśram* and other cultural celebrations, etc., to gain a clear view.

4.6.4. *The Interpretation of the Religious Practices of the Khrist Bhaktas at the Āśram*

At the Matridham *āśram*, the devotees gather for weekly and monthly *satsaṅgs* and for all the special occasions and festivities. When we examine the religious domain of the devotees, the *āśram* becomes the centre of their spiritual life⁸⁸¹. We have already given in our previous sections a “thick description”⁸⁸² of this religious domain.

Following the schema already mentioned at the introduction of this section, we shall start with identifying each faith expression and grouping together those expressions that have the same message or, in other words, locating each “cultur-

881 The semiotic domain is governed by what Turner has called a ‘root metaphor’ which gives direction to the signs to be included and the codes to be developed. The *Āśram* could be considered as playing the role of root metaphor in this case. See V.W. TURNER, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors. Symbolic Action in Human Society*, New York, Cornell University Press, 1975, p. 25. Turner borrows this term from S.C. PEPPER, *World Hypotheses*, Berkeley/Los Angeles, 1970, p. 95.

882 Geertz uses the term “thick description” for the detailed account of what is observed with an intellectual effort which is an elaborate venture. This is used to gain a native’s point of view. In our case we are not completely alien to the culture since as Indians we share with the devotees many things in common. See for details see C. GEERTZ, *The Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays*, New York, Basic Books, 1973, pp. 6-8.

al text” in order to decode them. After locating the “cultural texts” and identifying the elements in these expressions, we will look for the framework behind these elements and identify them. As mentioned earlier, in order to get a better grasp of the *ideational* elements, and for the sake of dealing with them competently, we shall divide the expressions into two conglomerations, namely, those expressions the devotees originally possessed before they became *Khrist Bhaktas*, and those expressions they acquired as a result of their association with the *āśram*.

4.6.4.1. The First Conglomeration of Expressions: Before Acquaintance with the *Āśram*

The elements of touching the floor or ground with hands or forehead at the entrance of the *āśram*, washing of feet or hands, sprinkling of water on themselves and removing the footwear before entering the holy places, offering flowers, fruit and sweets at the grotto or church, prostrating themselves at the grotto or Church, touching the statues or holy objects, taking the blessings from the priests or nuns by touching their feet, and singing the *bhajans* are all elements we observed in the *āśram*. Except for the singing of *bhajans*, all the others are non-verbal texts or elements. The devotees have been performing these actions with or without much modification even before they encountered the *āśram*.

We start with analysing each of these expressions to see if the (*ideational*) elements in these expressions in fact belong to a Hindu or a Christian framework, or could fit within both a Christian or Hindu framework. Among the first group of expressions, we could identify some expressions which are similar and can be grouped together. They are touching the ground with hands or forehead, touching the statue of the deity, and touching the feet of priests and nuns. In the Christian worldview, we do not find anything special in touching the ground with the hands or forehead or anything significant about touching the “feet” either. In the Hindu worldview, we find the practice of touching at the entrance or inside the temple. They also touch the feet of parents, elders, teachers, gurus, and the deities. This is both a mark of the submission and devotion as well as a mode of “taking” the blessings. Here the devotee or the author of the action is not asking for blessing, but is taking it from the other. The blessings are supposed to flow from the feet. Moreover, the feet cannot be clasped like the hands and so a devotee can take the blessing, even if the other person does not give it willingly. Besides the focus on taking the blessing, the practice of touching the feet has more significance. According to the Hindu point of view, devotees find shelter in the feet of the deity because if one wishes to be seen beneficially by the deity, one has to be at the feet of the deity⁸⁸³. These *ideational* elements exhibit the Hindu framework shrouded

883 BOBB, ‘Glancing’, p. 396.

underneath them. We do not see in these elements any signs of changing or shifting of framework from one to other.

The next elements which can be grouped together in one group are the washing of feet and hands, the sprinkling of water on themselves from the pond in front of *Mandir* and removing footwear before entering the holy places. Besides these, the other expressions which could be added to this group are the expression of offering flowers, fruit, and sweets at the grotto or the *mandir*.

Water has importance in both the religions. Many Hindus of higher *varṇ* have the ritual of purification *acvan*⁸⁸⁴ or the water ritual called *tarpan*⁸⁸⁵. Many important temples are by the side of a river or lake so that devotees can bathe before entering the temple⁸⁸⁶. The element of water is important in Christianity as well. Holy water is used in the baptismal ceremony. The water is blessed at Holy Saturday and taken home. It is kept at the entrance of the church for making the sign of the cross. The liturgy, on solemn occasions, begins by a “rite of blessing” in which the main celebrant sprinkles holy water on the faithful.

In the *Khrist Bhakta* movement, the washing of feet and the sprinkling of water on themselves is done before entering the building. It is done by the devotees and not by the priest. This resembles the act of Hindu devotees at the temple where they take the holy water (water from the morning bath of the deity), sip part of it and dispense the rest by passing it over the hair on their head⁸⁸⁷. Each individual is cleansing himself/herself before approaching the deity⁸⁸⁸. Closely related is the expression of offering fruit, flowers, or any other edible items in the grotto of Our Lady or in the church. Some Christians, mostly the tribal Christians, do bring fruit and other edible items to the church to be offered at the time of offertory. On an *ideational* level, a bit of a mixture of both frameworks is displayed. However, on a *performantial* level, these elements seem to play the role of helping the devotees to approach the deity individually, which discloses a dominantly Hindu framework.

The practice of removing the footwear before entering the house or any holy place is common to most people in India. Therefore, the element of removing the footwear does not specify any framework. We have already discussed the element of singing *bhajans* in our previous section.

884 *Acvan* (also called *acmana*) is the ritual of purifying one's body by sipping water and touching several parts of the body while reciting mantras. It is done on several occasions especially before performing any Hindu rituals. The simplest form consists of facing the east and taking water 3 times into the palm and sipping it three times from the base of the right thumb (called *brahma grantha*) while reciting the mantra.

885 *Tarpan* is the ritual of offering water to God, sages, deceased ancestors and souls and satisfying them.

886 Bathing is essential before entering the temple. Many times it is substituted by the washing of feet, sprinkling of water, etc.

887 RODRIGUES, *Introducing Hinduism*, p. 231.

888 It is possible that Christianity has interiorized this practice of bathing or cleansing by its attention to confession of sins.

4.6.4.2. The Second Conglomeration of Expressions: After Acquaintance with the *Āśram*

The second group of expressions are those which devotees have appropriated because of their association with the *āśram*. These expressions include the very fact of attending the community/group *satsaṅg* regularly in the *āśram*, the element of praising, worshiping, adoring and other forms of vocal prayer, the intercessory prayers, the shouting of alleluia, and repeating the Word of God. Except for the element of attending the regular prayer meetings, all other elements are verbal texts.

In Catholicism, attending the Holy Mass on every Sunday is a mandatory practice expected of every Catholic. Therefore, the churches have fixed timings for the Mass. It is quite normal for Catholics in India to attend the Eucharist every Sunday. For Hindus the temple is not a place of liturgical services for the congregation, but is the abode of the deity. They do not have fixed weekly mandatory worships meant for all the devotees. Many *Khrist Bhaktas* attend the *satsaṅg* regularly. This regularity and the single *satsaṅg* meant for all devotees display an element which resembles a Christian framework. At the same time, we also observe that a number of devotees come only when they are free or when they feel the need to do so. Some devotees visit to the temple while the *satsaṅg* is taking place in the *satsaṅg bhavan*. A few may even visit the grotto, while a few arrive late or leave early. This practice betrays a Hindu framework according to which one approaches the deity at his or her time, pace, and convenience. Thus, we observe here a mixture of elements depicting both the Hindu and Christian frameworks. Meanwhile, we also notice that the more devoted come to the *āśram* more regularly and take part in the full *satsaṅg* from beginning to end. This can be considered as an indication of growth in the faith and commitment to Christ or even as shift towards a Christian framework.

The next items for our scrutiny are the element of praising, worshiping and adoring and other forms of vocal prayer, the intercessory prayers, the shouting of alleluia, and repeating the Word of God. All these elements, except the Word of God have been scrutinized in our earlier section when we discussed the expressions of the devotees at home. Therefore, we do not repeat our analysis here but take up the element of repeating the Word of God at the *satsaṅg*. The element of repeating the Word of God is not seen in Hinduism. It is not normal for the ordinary Hindu to read, repeat, or use the scripture in prayer. Repeating the Word of God is not normal for Christians either. Therefore, we cannot say this element of repetition displays a Christian framework. We do, however, find this type of expression in the charismatic form of Christianity in India. On an *ideational* level, this charismatic form of expression is considered as a Christian form of countenance. Therefore, this element can be considered as having a Christian framework behind it.

4.6.5. The Interpretation of the Religious Practices at Festivities and Special Occasions

Besides the regular religious practices that we have already examined, there are some important religious practices of the devotees during festivities. They are the celebration of *gurupūrṇimā*, three-day monthly retreats, the annual three-day charismatic convention, and the celebration of Christmas, Lent, Good Friday, and Easter. In addition, we also examine the occasional personal devotions such as fasting, pilgrimage to the *āśram*, shaving off hair and offering hair at the *āśram*, and vows (*mannat*) to the Lord. The *āśram* becomes the pivotal point for most of these devotions.

The celebration of *gurupūrṇimā* (4.1.9) has several elements, which are part of the devotee's faith-expression. They are the elements of having a guru and allocating a day in honour of the guru, the element of touching the feet of the guru, and the element of receiving the *gurumantrā*. According to Hindu tradition, the guru merits primary respect over God because he leads the disciple to God. The "Guru is one who has himself ascertained the real and who knows the real from personal experience"⁸⁸⁹. He is able to initiate others into the same experience and knowledge of God from his own personal God-experience⁸⁹⁰. According to the Hindu understanding, the most important aspect of God-realization is finding a suitable guru, because without a guru one cannot achieve God-realization. Hindus believe that without a human guru they would be unable to remove the darkness of ignorance from the heart. They believe that at some stage of life, they should meet a guru and that meeting is considered as indispensable⁸⁹¹. They simply flock to have a single look or a gentle touch of his feet, which puts some in a state of ecstasy⁸⁹². "Choosing a guru in India is sometimes almost the counterpart of choosing a spouse in the west, or more accurately a parent"⁸⁹³. We do not find anything similar in Christianity. In Christianity in India, Christ is considered as the Guru par excellence. Considering the large number of devotees attending the *gurupūrṇimā* celebration at *āśram*, the practice of having a day especially dedicated to the guru, the enthusiasm to touch the feet of the human guru, the element of receiving his blessings on that day, and the element of taking the *gurumantrā*, display elements belonging to the Hindu framework.

The next sets of expressions we investigate are the celebrations of Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter. We can observe many common elements behind these celebrations. These celebrations are new to devotees and are the outcome

889 S.N. GIRI, 'The Guru in Hindu Tradition', in V. MATAJI (ed.), *Christian Ashrams*, p. 123.

890 ABHISHIKTANANDA, *Saccidananda. A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience*, Delhi, ISPCK, 1974, p. 202.

891 J. CASTELLINO, *Becoming an Indian Guru-Priest*, Shillong, Vendrame Missiological Institute, 1982, pp. 13-14.

892 ABHISHIKTANANDA, *Guru and Disciple*, London, ISPCK, 1974, p. 10.

893 D. SMITH, *Hinduism and Modernity*, Malden, Blackwell Publishing, 2003, p. 167. The Sikh tradition considers the Guru as the Supreme Being.

of their association with the *āśram*. The element of gathering for any religious function or celebration in large numbers and having processions as part of celebrations, etc. are common elements in both Hinduism and Christianity. As we have noted earlier, the element of gathering, staying together, and participating as one family or as one community manifests a Christian framework. At the same time, the element of gathering together and spending the whole night attending a religious function is not common among Christians in India. We observe this in Hinduism, especially in its rural embodiment. Though the devotion and piety are a matter for the individual, the celebration of festivals is a social affair. The community also holds night vigils during some feasts such as Gaṇeś *Chaturti* and on the third day of *diwālī*⁸⁹⁴. The element of procession for religious purpose is seen in both Hinduism and Christianity. The procession with the image of the Gaṇeś, Durga, or Kālī to be immersed in the river at the end of the festival days is a normal practice for the Hindus.

Which framework is operative when the devotees gather for these celebrations? It is true that both Hindus and Christians gather for religious celebrations. However, which of the frameworks is functional in these gatherings? The form of the celebrations show that they are long in duration, usually spending the whole night at the *āśram*, and they are not limited to attending just one ceremony, but several ceremonies. The element of the play acted during the eves of Christmas and Easter resembles the play called *rāmlīlā*⁸⁹⁵, which is conducted in the North Indian villages during the festival season of *daśahrā* (also written as *dasēra*). Year after year during the festival of *daśahrā* Hindus gather at night in large numbers to watch the *rāmlīlā* performed by semi-professional teams. Around 10,000 *rāmlīlās* are performed in North India, some of which last for a few days⁸⁹⁶. However, in Hinduism, the feasts are celebrated in the village context. Here, devotees leave their village, come to the *āśram*, and stay and celebrate there. Over all, we may consider them as having a slight bent towards a Hindu framework, although the content is Christian.

The ritual of the Way of the Cross is something new to the *Khrīst Bhaktas*. The element of the Cross and taking part in a ritual procession with the cross from their village to the *āśram*, and again within the *āśram*, has no Hindu equivalent. In accordance with the Hindu belief, the suffering that an individual experiences now cannot be separated from the deeds that one has done in the previous life⁸⁹⁷. Corresponding to the doctrine of *karm*, every sin must have its punish-

894 A. HUART, 'Hindu Calendar and Festivals', in R. ANTOINE, et al, (eds.), *Religious Hinduism. A Presentation and Appraisal*, Allahabad, St. Pauls Publications, 1964, p. 140.

895 The literal meaning of the word is Rama's play. It is a dramatic re-enactment of the life of Lord Ram culminating in the ten day warfare between Ram and Ravana as depicted in the religious epic Ramayana.

896 R. SCHECHNER, 'Ramlila of Ramnagar and America's Oberammergau. Two Celebratory Ritual Dramas', in V. TURNER (ed.), *Celebration. Studies in Festival and Ritual*, Washington, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982, p. 90.

897 A.A. YEWANGOE, *Theologia Crucis in Asia. Asian Christian Views on Suffering in the Face of Overwhelming Poverty and Multifaceted Religiosity in Asia*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1987, p. 98.

ment; even Brahma cannot interfere with this law. Though theoretically the idea of a suffering God-saviour is an unacceptable idea to Hindus⁸⁹⁸, the devotees have accepted Christ and his passion, as is clear from their enthusiasm to participate in the Way of the Cross and in venerating the Cross. The idea of God's love as seen in Christ who takes upon himself the consequences for our wrong choices seems to appeal to the devotees. God as co-sufferer is understood as the God who completely takes the side of the sufferers⁸⁹⁹. In the light of the suffering situations of the devotees, a sympathetic face of God is seen in the Cross and suffering of Christ. The Cross, the Way of the Cross, and its veneration are elements belonging to the Christian worldview.

The elements in the three-day monthly retreats and three-day annual charismatic conventions are similar. The elements in these expressions are those already examined (4.6.4) and so we do not repeat them here. However, these expressions during these occasions are more intense and more elaborate. During these days, the devotees stay at the *āśram* and share the same food. Though not strictly a religious expression, staying together and sharing meals exhibit an element which is communal and resembles more of a Christian framework. Nevertheless, we should not forget that in the holy atmosphere of a temple such contacts are not absent in Hinduism either.

Among the occasional religious practices, there are some personal devotions such as fasting, walking to the *āśram* as a pilgrimage, shaving off and offering the hair at the *āśram*, and vows (*mannat*) to God. We have given a detailed description of these expressions earlier (4.1.12-14). The elements of fasting, pilgrimage, and making vows to God are seen in both Hinduism and Christianity. Though the element of fasting is common to both Christians and Hindus, the manner in which it is practised is different in both religions. The most common mode of fasting in Christianity is abstaining from solid food. Some Christians fast by taking only one meal a day. The practice of abstinence and fasting for 40 days during Lent, with a full fasting on Fridays, is a common form of fasting in Christianity. In Hinduism there are different kinds of fasting⁹⁰⁰. Some individuals fast on certain days of a month, some fast on certain days of every week, some fast during the new moon and full moon, while most Hindus, especially the women, fast during the festivals such as *mahāśivrātri*, or nine days of *navrātri*. Married women fast for the feast of *karvā cauth*. The manner of fasting also varies from person to person. While fasting, most Hindus do not eat during the day but after sunset. Some people eat fruit or drink juice or milk while others drink only water. Yet some others eat one meal consisting of no cereal but boiled pota-

898 S. AROKIASAMY, *Dharma, Hindu and Christian, according to Roberto De Nobili. Analysis of its Meaning and its Use in Hinduism and Christianity*, Roma, Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1986, p. 239.

899 YEWANGOE, *Theologia Crucis in Asia*, p. 304.

900 Hindus in general are vegetarians and so the idea of abstinence from meat is absent in Hinduism. However, abstinence from certain food item is in practice in relation to their fasting.

toes or *sabudhāna khicrī*. As practiced among the *Khrist Bhaktas*, the majority drink only liquids during the day between sunrise and sunset. Women fast on all Fridays and all devotees fast on Fridays in Lent. As the element of fasting is common to both Hindu and Christian frameworks, can we see any sign of one of these frameworks in particular at work or are both frameworks operative here? Looking at the mode of fasting, we find the Hindu framework operative while stressing fasting on Fridays, the 40 days of Lent, and the Fridays of Lent depicts a Christian framework.

Another form of expression used by devotees to show their faith in Christ is shaving off the hair and offering it at the *āśram* (4.1.13). Offering the hair to the deity is a practice commonly seen among the Hindus. People offer their hair as a response for favours received. The birth of a child after many years of marriage or passing exams are examples. An oath taken earlier, if and when it comes to pass, will be a sign that God has answered their prayers, and so the hair is offered in return. It is also used as a symbol of total submission to God and a means of seeking forgiveness for sins. Hair is considered as part of the body and by tonsuring at temple the hair is given back to God. The temple in Thirupathi, Andhra Pradesh is a preferred place for the Hindus to perform the tonsure. Tonsuring is also seen among Christians of some regions. Many Christians, especially from the province of Andhra Pradesh, practice the ritual of offering hair at the Christian pilgrim centre. Velankanni in Tamil Nadu is the most favoured place for Christians. Thus, the element of shaving off the hair and offering it to the Lord is present largely in Hinduism while it is also seen in some pockets in Christianity.

The expression of taking *mannat* (a vow to the Lord) includes within it several expressions such as walking to the *āśram* as pilgrimage, offering flowers, fruit, sweets, etc. at the *āśram*, prostrating at several places in the *āśram*, and shaving off hair at the *āśram*. The element of walking to the pilgrim centres is common to both Hindus and Christians in India. The element of making a vow to the Lord is seen primarily in Hinduism but is also present among the Christians. Both Hindus and Christians offer fruit, etc., at temple or church. Which framework is operative behind the elements in these expressions? Can we say that the devotees have a Hindu framework while carrying out these individual faith expressions or can we say that the frameworks behind these expressions are from the Christian worldview? The practices of the devotees, such as bringing flowers and garlanding the statue of Our Lady, offering sweets not only in the church but also in the grotto, in the *satsaṅg bhavan*, etc., and the element of prostration at several places, etc., suggests a framework which is rather closer to the Hindu world view.

4.6.6. *The Interpretation of the Social Relations and Commitment of the Khrist Bhaktas*

In India, the social domain and religious domain are very much inter-related. Although in the strict (Western) sense, social relations and social commitment do not come under the title of religious practices, in the Indian context we need to

consider their inter-connectedness seriously. Therefore, we examine the social relations and social commitment of the *Khrist Bhaktas* in order to gain a better grasp of the framework behind the practices. They will give us an opportunity to discover possible pointers of change from one framework to another.

We have seen that Indian society, especially the rural society, is divided by several *varṇas*, sub-castes, and outcastes. In addition, we have noticed that there is no interaction or social mobility between them. An orthodox Hindu would never imagine marrying outside his *varṇ*, would not eat with anyone not belonging to his *varṇ*, and would be reluctant to attend any social functions of the people outside his *varṇ*⁹⁰¹. Combined with the *varṇ* system, Hindu society is also regulated by the law of *karm*. Hence, even when charitable works are done, it is done as a means of improving one's status (and *karm*) and not for the sake of love of neighbour. Therefore, we do not see much social commitment in Hinduism.

Dividing the people hierarchically based on birth and segregating each other based on caste considerations is a typical Hindu framework. The *Khrist Bhaktas* are able to stand united and enter into some kind of communion. People of all *varṇas*, sub-castes, and outcastes come together and interact in the *āśram*. We agree that this is happening in the holy ambience. A complete change of framework will be visible only when the *Khrist Bhaktas* would be able to enter into inter-caste marriages⁹⁰². However, in the village at the prayer meeting, *Khrist Bhaktas* of several castes come together under the same roof and pray for one another. These are small indicators of a change from a Hindu framework to a Christian framework.

Christianity places much emphasis on the aspect of love of neighbour. Accordingly, love of God is to be seen in the love of neighbour. The members of the *āśram* through the *satsaṅgs* and monthly retreats teach the devotees about the importance of the virtue of charity. We notice among the *Khrist Bhaktas* a small gesture of sharing the rice with the *muṣahars*. Can we say that behind this expression it is the Hindu framework or the Christian framework that is operative? Considering change in the social relations and the teaching by the staff of the *āśram* during the monthly retreats and thus the possibility of imbibing the Christian message, we can say that behind the small expression of sharing the rice with the poor, a glimpse of change of the framework is seen.

4.6.7. *The Interpretation of the Cultural Festivals of Devotees*

What changes are reflected in the cultural world, especially in their attitude towards the cultural celebrations when devotees become more and more committed to Christ? We have already observed the existing variations in the degree of participation of devotees in cultural festivals. We can divide the devotees into three

901 THOMAS, *Hindu Religions, Customs and Manners*, p. 11.

902 Some of the devotees mentioned that they are ready to give in or take in marriage from the *dalit* community, but their community at large and the relatives will not allow them to do so.

broad categories or groups: those devotees who turn up to the *āśram* only occasionally, those devotees who visit the *āśram* rather regularly, and those who frequent the *āśram* and are closely associated with and are more committed to the *āśram*⁹⁰³.

The first group of devotees shows up in the *āśram* only when they feel the need for God or for gaining some blessings, material or spiritual. After becoming *Khrīst Bhaktas* the only visible change in them is that they now do not go to the Hindu temples, but come to *āśram* for their spiritual needs. This group of devotees continues to live within the same framework in which they had been living. By becoming *Bhaktas* we do not notice any change in their worldview or in their cultural world.

The second group of devotees visits the *āśram* often. At the same time, they join their Hindu neighbours for all cultural festivals. We notice some kind of change in their celebrations. Their outward expressions remain the same. They light lamps and decorate the houses at the festival of *diwālī*, apply *tilak* on the forehead on the feast of *holī* etc. They allow their children to take part in all of the festivities and buy new clothes for them on such occasions. Some changes are observed in their celebrations. However, instead of offering light and *pūjā* to Hindu gods or goddesses, they now do it in honour of Christ. They buy new clothes for themselves at Christmas and decorate their houses on Christmas as well. Included in this category are those devotees who participate in the *pūjā* of Hindu gods or goddesses and in all the celebrations, as their families are against their faith in Christ not lenient to them.

The third group of devotees seems to have developed a negative attitude towards these festivals and do not join them. Furthermore, they seem to have taken the elements of these “Hindu” feasts and placed them in similar “Christian” celebrations. The case of decorating the house with lights/*diyā* at Christmas as against the earlier practice of lighting the *diyā* at *diwālī* is an indication of such a change. Likewise, they purchase new clothes not on *diwālī* or *holī* but at Christmas. The neighbours have accepted this change by no longer bringing to them the *prasād* from the temple. However, most devotees continue to celebrate the feast of *rakṣa bandhan* in the same way as the village community. The devotees also join the other celebrations in the village such as related to rites of passage. They also invite neighbours, and are invited by neighbours, for weddings and other celebrations. It is probable that because these celebrations have less religious significance, the devotees feel at home celebrating it.

The interpretation of the religious practices of the *Khrīst Bhaktas* has depicted the fluidity of the situation. Many elements in their faith practices at home, in the *āśram*, and in the villages exhibit both a Hindu and a Christian framework. The

903 The details of their celebration are given in 4.4.1.

charismatic forms of expressions exhibit a Christian framework. The elements of those practices, which the *Khrist Bhaktas* have adopted after their association with the *āśram*, have a tendency of slight impulsion towards the Christian worldview. Many other elements come from those rituals, which the *Bhaktas* have been practicing as part of their religio-cultural world, which is now carried to the new situation with more commitment and intensity. These expressions from a Hindu perspective are normal signs of commitment to their faith. When the devotees use them in the new context, these expressions retain the old meaning but due to the new faith, newer meanings are added to it⁹⁰⁴. Faith in Christ, indeed, has not changed the expressions but, on the level of meaning, by using them a hybridity or a situation with hybrid features is coming into existence. The overall picture that emerges is a mosaic of both the Hindu and Christian frameworks.

4.7. Evaluation of the Faith-Expressions Based on the Criteria for Inculturation in the Area of Community Building

In our introduction, we had mentioned the twin task of this chapter. The first task was to unearth the framework behind the religious practices. The second task was to find out the contribution of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement towards inculturation in India based on the criteria we have already formulated⁹⁰⁵. We want to find out what happens to the Christian message or the Gospel as it travels to the Indian context and what happens to the culture of the people as they live that Gospel. As Robert Schreiter shows, in a semiotics of religious identity as it crosses from one culture to another, the Christian message remains the same from culture to culture⁹⁰⁶. This message as presented in the Gospels, interpreted, and handed down to us through centuries has now been passed on to the *Khrist Bhaktas*. Although the Gospel message is unchangeable and universal, it can be expressed in a way more understandable and acceptable to the people through several ways⁹⁰⁷. The *Khrist Bhaktas* have accepted Christ as their only saviour, but they have accepted him from within their cultural universe. However, as we have seen people do not take new information into a vacuum but relate it to what is already known. Over time, the new information may come to have a prominent place in and transform a cognitive universe or worldview. However, it always begins by relating to what is already known⁹⁰⁸. The newfound faith of the *Khrist Bhaktas* is visible in their religious domain we have analyzed above. We have seen that they have accepted the faith into their cultural universe and express it in

904 John Webster Grant thinks that the result of the inculturation should enable the community to act naturally. See J.W. GRANT, *God's People in India*, Mysore, The Christian Literature Society, 1969, p. 41.

905 The criteria was presented in 1.6.

906 SCHREITER, *The New Catholicity*, p. 71.

907 N. STANDAERT, *Inculturation. The Gospel and Cultures*, Pasay City, St. Paul Publications 1994, p. 41. See more details on this subject in our earlier discussion on inculturation in 2.2.

908 SCHREITER, *The New Catholicity*, p. 71.

rituals, codes, and elements meaningful to them. So, in the new context, the message has to be both meaningful to them and challenging to their presuppositions. The same message is carried by different cultural codes. Let us find out if the expressions of the *Khrist Bhaktas* stand up to the criteria we have formulated. The criteria on the side of content stressed the need for any inculturation to be faithful to the Gospel and culture of the people⁹⁰⁹. On the side of the process of inculturation, the criteria dealt with the role of community, experts, and the necessity of learning lessons from earlier efforts. It also spoke about the role and relations between universal and other particular churches and the need for understanding the Church in relationship and in subordination to the Kingdom of God. For the sake of avoiding repetitions and the monotony of taking up each expression and scrutinizing it individually, we shall take up the criteria and determine if and how these criteria are actualised in the *Khrist Bhakta* movement.

4.7.1. *The Criterion of Faithfulness to the Gospel*

Our first positive criterion intended to find out if the expressions were in harmony with Christ and His message as presented in the New Testament and interpreted throughout the centuries by the community of faithful (1.6.1.1). The expressions of keeping the picture of Jesus at home, wearing the Christians symbols, lighting the *diyā* in front of the picture of Jesus regularly in the morning and evening without fail, the *ārtī* done to His picture, and the family prayer speak volumes about their faithfulness to Christ. Besides these religious practices at home, on a weekly basis the devotees regularly visit the *āśram* and listen to the Word of God preached to them, attend the prayer meetings with devotion, join the singing and praising, participate in the healing services, and devote themselves in the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Their participation in the Christian festivities such as Christmas and Easter, their spirit of strict observance of Lent, and their earnestness in joining the ritual of the Way of the Cross and other Holy Week programmes are all examples of their deep faith in Christ and their desire to follow his ways.

These expressions in the context of North India have social consequences. In spite of such challenges, the devotees display an admirable adherence to Christ and His gospel by expressing in public their faith. Displaying only the Christian symbols and discarding all Hindu gods or symbols, wearing only typical symbols and not wearing any of the Hindu sacred threads, and willingly acknowledging Christ as the only saviour and thereby accepting any consequences, is a bold gesture and commitment to Christ and his Gospel. Moreover, it has to be kept in mind that when they became devotees of Christ they discarded their family gods or the symbol of family gods and took them to the *āśram* to be destroyed (see

909 Although faithfulness is a slippery concept, the stress here is on interpretation using sound hermeneutical principles as we have explained in our section on criteria.

4.1.2). Christ is the only God and He is the only saviour for them. They have consciously committed themselves to Him.

In addition to the public witness to their faith, we also observe signs of internalization of the message of Christ. We have seen how the devotees, after attending the monthly retreats, change their personal lives, some even stopping habits such as drinking alcohol and chewing tobacco, trying to live in peace with their neighbours by overcoming petty disputes, forgiving one another, and learning to respect one another in the family. Although drinking alcohol is not prohibited in the Christian circle, the priests and the leaders in the movement are using the Indian values in Christian preaching. Additionally, people divided by *varṇas* and sub-castes are able to come together as one family and join the one prayer meeting both in the village and in the *āśram*. All these are indicators of the internalization of the Christian message and Christian values.

However, faithfulness to the Christian message implies faithfulness to the Trinitarian aspect of God as well. The charismatic elements exhibit the role of Holy Spirit but an attention on God as the creator and Father needs further accentuation. Care has to be given that Christo-centrism shall not lead to Christomonism. Overall, the public behaviour of the devotees and the signs of internalization of the Christ and His message indicate the faithfulness of the *Khrist Bhaktas* to Christ and His Gospel, although room for growth is not ruled out, and therefore fulfil the first criteria to a great extent.

4.7.2. *The Criterion of Faithfulness to the Culture*

Our second criterion was faithfulness to the culture (1.6.1.2), which meant approaching the culture as what constitutes the people and as God-given, and rejecting only the dehumanizing elements in it⁹¹⁰. Negatively, it warns us against indiscriminate borrowing, blind copying, instrumentalising, or glorifying any culture. We shall now examine how this criterion is realized in the *Khrist Bhakta* movement. The faith expressions such as keeping the picture of Jesus at home, wearing the symbol, and the family and village prayers with its components are the specific expressions under scrutiny. The expressions of prayer, such as the lighting of lamp, *ārtī*, singing *bhajans*, etc., are expressions familiar for the people of India in general. Faith in God and all kinds of spiritual expressions are highly appreciated in Indian culture. People look with respect on those who pray daily and frequently. Daily prayer is a sign that one is oriented towards the higher values in life and earns respect from others. Therefore, these expressions in the context of family prayer and village prayer are in tune with the cultural heritage of India and fulfil the criterion of faithfulness to the culture.

910 We are aware of the difficulty in defining the term culture. See our description and discussion on culture in section of criteria 1.6.1.2.

The expressions such as the intercessory prayer, vocal prayer, praise and worship in a loud voice are new to the culture of North India. Intercessory prayers are not common but praying for another is not against the culture of the people. After all, Indian culture promotes a prayer-culture. Making intercessions does not mean that the stress on personal prayer is diminished, but adds another dimension to it. Intercessions make the devotees more open and sensitive to the needs of others. Thus, it enriches the already spiritual culture of the land by adding one more dimension to it. Eventually, it can have its effect in the ethical and social life. Presently, we can say that the intercession does not in any way diminish faithfulness to the culture.

Praise and worship in a loud voice is alien to the Indian prayer ethos. Vocal prayer itself is not present very much in India. It is not normal for people to raise their voice in prayer, so they may not understand why one should shout while praying. People in general are not able to understand it, and they see this expression as strange. Therefore, we cannot say that it is in tune with or against the culture of the people. As we have seen earlier, this is typically a charismatic element.

Taking the blessed oil and water home and using it for several purposes and sharing them with anyone in need are something familiar to the people generally. The Hindu brethren bring holy water from the Ganges and keep it at home (4.5.3.1). They also carry home *prasād* from the temple to be shared with anyone and everyone. Taking the *prasād* home is the practice they have been following before they became devotees of Christ, and it is considered normal practice in India. Therefore, it is quite normal for the people to carry home the blessed water, oil and *prasād* and thus it fulfils the criteria of faithfulness to the culture of the people.

The faith expressions of the devotees at the festivities follow the above-mentioned pattern. Some of the expressions such as the Way of the Cross, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, etc. are quite new to the culture, but as we have noted already, normally any form of faith expression is welcomed in India. Our assessment of the strengths of the movement had discovered that preserving the culture of the *Bhaktas* and preserving them in their culture is an important success of the movement⁹¹¹. Thus, we discover in this movement the presence of expressions from Christianity and Hinduism, which, in turn, is paving the way for the emergence of a hybridity.

Synchronously, our examination had found a tendency among the more committed devotees to avoid the cultural celebrations of the people. Some of them participated in these festivals because of the pressure from family members who are not devotees. We have seen their inclination to avoid anything they see as “Hindu” and to replace it with what they see as “Christian”. What is required

911 See our earlier section 4.5.

is accepting the culture as a whole while challenging the negativities in the culture. It seems that there is some ambiguity between what is perceived as elements belonging to “Hindu culture” and “Hindu religion”.

However, from the above discussion, it is clear that in the *Khrist Bhakta* movement one could find the presence of expressions from both Hinduism and Christianity and, thereby, the emergence of a new hybridity. Riding on the movement, Christianity seems to find new cultural expressions. The community of the *Khrist Bhaktas* seem to benefit from the Christian faith. Christian faith has started to challenge the negativities in the culture, although the road ahead is longer and steep. The devotees have used the elements of the local culture to express the Christian faith, thereby giving Christianity a local expression.

4.7.2.1. The Focus on the Threefold Realities of Asia

The criterion of faithfulness to the culture wanted to be sensitive to the threefold reality of Asia, namely, the extreme poverty of its poor majority, the several indigenous cultures, and the existence of several religions (1.6.1.2.1.). In general, it can be said that the devotees themselves are representative of the threefold reality of Asia. The majority of them are rural poor. None of their spiritual expressions offends the poor majority, or becomes an obstacle to the diversity of Indian cultures and religions. Their family prayer and other spiritual expressions do not work against becoming sensitive to the threefold realities of India. None of their practices in any way seems to go against the threefold reality.

In the sharing of food grains, especially during the Lent, we can see a small example of their concern for the poorest among them. Having heard the sermons in the *āśram* and listening to the advice of the staff, even though they are poor themselves, the *Bhaktas* are willing to share their food grains with the poorer brethren. This sharing is a sign of their solidarity with the weakest among them⁹¹².

We are not sure about the attitude of the devotees towards other religions. The Christianity presented to the devotees is in a charismatic form, and in certain charismatic groups, other religions are considered as originating from Satan and are looked down upon. At present, we have not observed anything negative towards other religion, although there is a tendency among some devotees to avoid anything they see as Hindu. On the positive side, we have seen the annual interreligious meeting conducted at the Matridham *āśram* where leaders of different religions are present. However, care should be taken that negative attitudes towards other regions shall not creep into this movement.

As part of the focus on the threefold reality of India comes the caution that people should not be forced to change their worldview (1.6.1.2.1). This criterion

912 Focus on the extreme poverty calls for working for social justice also, which we do not find in the movement at present.

wanted to consider the worldview of the people as part of their culture. Therefore, enforcing its replacement as a pre-condition for accepting the Christian faith is unnecessary and improper. The *Khrist Bhaktas* are not forced to substitute their worldview with something from outside, although faith in Christ seems to have an impact on it. Presently, what we find is a mixture of both the worldviews (4.6).

4.7.3. *The Criterion of the Role of Community and Experts*

We shall now briefly examine in what respect the religious practices of *Khrist Bhaktas* give indications of fulfilling the process criteria. The process criteria include the role of community, the role of experts, and the lessons learned from earlier efforts (1.6.2.). We shall deal with the roles of community and experts at the same time as they are related. The criterion of the role of community perceives inculturation essentially as a community process that has to be evolved and not as a pre-planned activity initiated by some experts. It is not an insertion of certain elements by some outsiders, but is the result of the lived expression of a faithful community. This criterion designates the principal role of community over experts and other churches in providing norms of success in inculturation. The roles of experts (1.6.2.2) are seen as making sure of the Christian character of the new creation which inculturation brings into existence. In other words, they assist the community in making necessary discernment and critique of its own culture and the discovery of the seeds of the Word. They also may stir, interpret, and refine the creativity of the community.

Concerning the first conglomeration of the expressions, we have already noted that the devotees performed these actions in honouring the Hindu gods as part of their devotion and religious practices. The devotees perform all these actions, sometimes with slight modifications, in honour of Jesus Christ and as the result of their devotion and commitment to Him. None of these actions is performed by the devotees following instructions from others but came to them naturally and spontaneously. Thus, it is the community which conceives and performs them fulfilling the criteria of community involvement. The expressions of the devotees at *āśram*, such as those observed in the grotto, entrance, or *mandir* also come under this category where the devotees freely express their faith.

At the same time, there are also actions done by the community at the insistence of the leaders, such as the case of praise and worship in a loud voice. It is clear that devotees perform these actions because they have seen the leaders doing them in the *āśram*. These actions could be seen as the result of the natural reverence people have towards the authorities, or as a sign of the power of leaders working on the mentality of the community.

Although the experts are not directly involved in this movement, particularly in the religious expressions of the devotees at home and in the village, the priests and the local bishop do now play a role. We saw that the diocese had arranged a meeting (3.10.3.5) of all those who are interested or involved in the *Khrist Bhakta*

movement in order to discuss all the issues related to it. Though outside experts did not attend the meeting, many present voiced the need to invite experts to future meetings. Therefore, it gives the scope for the involvement of the experts at a later date.

When we discuss the community aspects of the *Khrist Bhaktas* it is also important that we look at the leader or guru orientation of the movement. Can we say that the *Khrist Bhakta* movement is a community movement? Alternatively, is it just one of the guru-centred movements? A closer look at the dynamics and reticulation of the movement is needed to find more about it. Therefore, we shall make an analysis of the role played by the *aguās*, the *āśram* staff and finally the role of Anil Dev.

Someone becomes an *aguā* when so recognized by the leadership of the *āśram*. Mostly, the *āśram* recognizes as *aguās* those who have already felt the touch of Jesus. They are neither appointed by the *āśram* nor do the devotees elect them. They do not receive any remuneration or payment.⁹¹³ They freely serve the movement in response to the favours they have received from God⁹¹⁴. In the *āśram*, they help in maintaining the discipline. In the village, they communicate with the other devotees about the prayer meetings and conduct them. If a priest or head catechist visits the village, the *aguās* are informed and they make arrangements.

Their role is clearly visible in how the movement is spread. Our findings show that most people come to hear about the *āśram* and Jesus from one of the devotees who frequent the *āśram*. Generally, the women tell other women in the village or in the neighbouring villages⁹¹⁵. They come to the *āśram* for the first time accompanied by other women. Then they inform their husbands and other men in the family⁹¹⁶. If they are willing, or at least not against the faith of the women, then the whole family becomes *Khrist Bhaktas*⁹¹⁷. Later, they convey this to their relatives and acquaintances. Mostly, they approach an *aguā*, or are guided to an *aguā*, to learn more about Jesus and other faith practices. The *aguās* pass on their knowledge and experience of Christian faith to them. The *aguās* also visit neighbouring villages and spread the Christian message and invite people to the prayer meetings in the village and the *āśram*. People contact the *aguās* requesting prayers and guidance about Christ and Christianity. Ordinary devotees do not approach the members of the *āśram* but the *aguas* with all kinds of questions and problems.

913 Usually in the parishes and mission stations in India the catechists are paid by the church.

914 There are also some *aguās* who work for themselves and collect money for the prayers, etc. Some of them are also self-appointed *aguās*.

915 There are also cases where the men have taken initiative like Shanta Prasad, or Mr. Prakash.

916 The story of Asharam and his wife. Later, he become an *aguā*.

917 Sometimes the men do not like to join or in many cases the men are against the women going to the *āśram*.

It is clear that the *aguās* are important persons in the *Khrist Bhakta* movement. They are the grass roots leaders and intermediaries between the *āśram* and the people. However, they can be replaced easily since they are not employed. There are instances when an *aguā* is stripped of his/her “*aguaship*” because of misdeeds and replaced by another *aguā*. We also have the incident of one leading *aguā* becoming separated from his followers and forming a separate church. However, in spite of their important role in the village, the movement is not centred on them. As a group, the *aguās* fulfil certain functions, but *aguaship* does not depend on the persons but on the *āśram*. Therefore, we can conclude that the movement is not centred on *aguās*, but very well supported by them.

Now let us examine the role of the *āśram* staff in the *Khrist Bhakta* movement. They have a significant role in the *Khrist Bhakta* movement. The *āśram* is the centre of many activities and the focal point of holiness for the devotees. The staff of the *āśram* preach the Word to the devotees, guide them in prayer, and lead the singing, praise and worship, etc. They also conduct retreats for the devotees, renewal and leadership training for the *aguās*. The devotees look up to them for guidance, consolation, prayer, and blessings. The devotees consider them as holy and take their blessings by touching their feet.

However, the role of staff members of the *āśram* is mostly limited to the *āśram* premises. The movement is not centred on them although most of the activities in the *āśram* are dependent on them. They do not become instrumental in bringing new members directly. Generally, new *Bhaktas* approach the staff members, through either a devotee or an *aguā*. Devotees come to them, but they do not look for any of them specifically, but often request assistance from any of them. Except Girija, not many of them visit the villages regularly. Only Fr. Anil Dev, Sr. Lucretia, and Girija have remained in the *āśram* continuously from the beginning until now. We shall consider the cases of Fr. Anil Dev separately. Sr. Lucretia keeps an eye on the orderliness of things. Girija, being a layman who has been serving the *āśram* for a long time, is more approachable for the devotees than Sr. Lucretia, although she is available to offer any help if required. Girija visits the villages and so people are more familiar with him. However, none of them is indispensable and the movement does not depend on any one of them although they are essential in running the movement and the *āśram*.

Now we shall investigate the role of the guru and whether the whole movement is a guru movement or not. We are aware that guru movements are rather common in India. Hence, it is important to determine if this movement has at least some tendencies towards becoming guru-centred. Our observations, discussions, and interviews present us with a mixed result. Some people close to the movement, especially people like Ashirvadam, a lay staff member in *āśram*, Girija, the head catechist, and some of the *aguās*, feel that the movement will come to a standstill in the event Anil Dev leaves the movement. They reason that people come to listen to him, and want to receive his blessings. They also describe occasions when Anil Dev is absent from the *āśram* for a couple of Sundays and

the devotees are not very happy about it. Every time they come to the *āśram* to attend the prayer meetings they desire to see him, listen to him, and receive his blessings. Girija points out how some devotees, normally new ones, call Anil Dev as *Jesubhāvā* (Jesus the mendicant). Therefore, in their opinion, the whole movement is growing around his aura and they cannot imagine it without his guidance.

There are others who regard him as important person, but not as irreplaceable. They think that someone who is equally efficient and who has similar charisma can replace Anil Dev. Most of the priests working with him feel that the movement will be affected, but it will not be stopped if he moves out abruptly. They are hopeful that if a new person is introduced slowly, the damage will be minimal. Both the congregation (IMS) and the diocese are confident that they will be able to find a replacement for him in the unlikely event of his moving away. We also spoke to Anil Dev about the future of the movement and his role as guru. He says that he has sustained the movement in such a way that it is not centred on him and he tries to avoid being in the centre of attention.

Our focus here is not the person of Anil Dev but on whether the movement is centred on a guru, be it Anil Dev or someone else. When we look at the whole movement and its religious practices, we see that it is centred on the *āśram*. Most religious practices are in the *āśram*. People consider the *āśram* as the holy place, a place where they can have the vision of Jesus, the eternal guru and Anil Dev, the human guru.

When the Eucharist is taken in procession to the *satsaṅg bhavan* during the adoration, people throng to have a closer *darśan* (vision) of the Sacrament or even try to touch the feet, hands, legs, garments of at least the priest who carries it. Therefore, they consider the Blessed Sacrament as the most important thing in the *āśram*. The oil and water are blessed with the Sacrament and the healing prayer is done before the Sacrament, and miracles take place at the time of Benediction. There are occasions when the guru is absent for many weeks and the *satsaṅg* is carried out without his presence, but Blessed Sacrament and the benediction is an inseparable part of the *satsaṅg*. It seems that although the role of a human guru is very important, the focus is not fully on the human guru, but on Jesus and the *āśram*. It is possible that the devotees look at Anil Dev as someone who mediates the blessing of Jesus in a significant manner.

The criteria for community building wanted inculturation to be in tune with the Asian or Indian understanding of the community. In India, people share a cultural unity although they belong to diverse religious groups, races, sects, and communities⁹¹⁸. We had noted that in the Indian way of being community, the boundaries are so fluid that one could be in the Jesus community without ceasing

918 N. JAYAPALAN, *Indian Society and Social Institutions*, New Delhi, Atlantic Publishers and Distributions, 2001, p. 1.

to be a participant in other religious experiences and expressions of community and vice versa⁹¹⁹. The formation of the *Khrist Bhaktas* as a community is taking place along the similar lines of having neither an initiation nor any explicit boundaries. This community reflects some form of an Indian or Asian sense of community. Its fluidity facilitates multiple belonging – being a Hindu and a follower of Christ at the same time. We agree that Hinduism allows the coming together of people of different *varṇas* in the aura of the holy/*āśram*. However, in the *Khrist Bhakta* movement faith in Christ is challenging the segregating and alienating elements in the Indian society although it has not yet broken the caste barrier. We have already seen more about the community formation while we discussed the strengths of the movement (4.5.1).

4.7.4. *The Criterion of Lessons from Earlier Efforts*

Our criteria wanted to use the lessons learned from earlier efforts (1.6.3) to be used for any deliberation on future inculturation. In our evaluation of the earlier efforts, we found that the efforts of individual pioneers were limited to the elites, priests, and religious, and not accessible and meaningful for ordinary people. The main criticism of the concerted effort of the church in India under the banner of NBCLC was that it was limited largely to liturgy alone. In addition, the overall effort and the 12 points in particular were limited to the *brahmanical* elements, which, in turn, neglected the other sections of society. The *āśram* movement as well had similar limitations⁹²⁰.

The religious practices of the devotees show that the *Khrist Bhakta* movement is not limited to elites, religious, or monks, but that the ordinary people participate, get involved, and even take the lead. The actions and expressions have mostly emerged from the people. Every individual has a role in these actions and can participate in the prayer. The majority of the *aguās* are women. At home, the family takes the lead and mostly it is the women who lead the prayer and takes the initiative. Therefore, both the sexes have a role in the movement, which are not limited to any class or caste, but allow every caste group to find its own role. It is the family which is important, and not the castes. Even at the village meeting, all caste members sit together for prayer. The *dalits* and tribals (though not many in this area) do feel at home and even lead some of the village prayer groups. The religious practices we have seen are practices in the family and village, and the practices in the *āśram*. Unlike the 12 Points of Adaptation, which was limited to the liturgy in the church, here the practices at home, village, and the *āśram* are considered. Moreover, most of the efforts and practices come from the people, although the leaders introduced some. Thus, the expressions we have

919 WILFRED, 'Emerging Trends Challenge the Churches of Asia', in W. JENKINSON & H. O'SULLIVAN (eds.) *Trends in Mission. Toward the Third Millennium. Essays in Celebration of Twenty-five years of SEDOS*, New York, Orbis books, 1991, p. 16.

920 See for details in 2.2.4 & 2.3.3.4.

studied and analyzed do not fall into the same pitfalls as earlier inculturations in India.

4.7.5. *The Role and Relation between Universal and Other Particular Churches*

The Universal Church and the local churches have a mutual receiving and giving role (1.6.3) and recognize the local church as the local expression of the Universal Church. The local expression stands, in the end, under the judgment of the other local churches and the Universal Church. However, the Asian theologians are trying to express theology in a specifically Asian way and with respect to Asian realities; therefore, it is inappropriate to assess them with respect to criteria derived from a different context⁹²¹.

Strictly speaking, the religious practices of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement are all expressions of a people in their home or village. These expressions seem to have no special bearing in the universal or other sister/local churches and should be seen as local devotions. Every local church is the local expression of the same Universal Church. Every local church has to remain open to the *sensus fidelium* of the wider community outside. At the level of movement, the local Bishop, as representative of the Universal Church, gives timely directions if needed. He supports the movement and encourages it in his diocese (see 3.10.3 & 3.11.2). Theoretically speaking, the criterion of involvement of Universal and other local churches is valid, but, here, in the concrete situation of judging the spiritual practices of the devotees at home, it becomes a non-criterion.

4.7.6. *Criterion of a Certain Relativization of Church in Relation to the Kingdom of God*

Our next criterion spoke about a certain relativization of the Church in relation to the Kingdom of God, according to which the church is seen as the sacrament, sign, and instrument through which Christ realizes the Kingdom of God. Therefore, in our inculturation more stress shall be given to the Kingdom criterion (1.6.4.).

If we look at the *Khrist Bhakta* movement as such and the guidance given by the staff of the *āśram*, we do not find much stress on church as an institution. The staff's effort is to teach people about Christ and his Gospel. There is no enthusiasm on their part to baptise the devotees and make them members of the church. At the same time, questions remain about how the values of the Kingdom are seen in the religious practices and expressions of the people and how many of these values are seen in the preaching of the staff.

Additionally, the focus on the Kingdom wanted to welcome into the fold of the church people who feel called to become disciples of Jesus. The movement welcomes all people and the *āśram* is a place open to all. The movement does

921 K. KIM, 'Missiology as Global Conversation of Contextual Theologies', in *Mission Studies* 21, 2004, p. 47.

not have any restrictions. Everyone is welcome into the movement, into the āśram, and not strictly into the fold of the church.

4.8. Conclusion

The “Christianity of the *Khrish Bhakta* movement” has given us a detailed account of the religious practices of the *Khrish Bhaktas* at home, in the village, and in the āśram as well as presenting their spiritual experiences. Faith in Christ has already started to show its social implications. Peace within family and society is slowly increasing because of a change in character. The newfound faith in Christ seems to shake the age-old caste barriers. The assessment of the strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats of the movement has given a comprehensive picture of the movement. It manifests a glimpse of building a community of faith from below. When people are not taken out of their culture and are not forced to change their legal and community status, the earlier opposition to Christianity seems to fade. Christ is being accepted as the only saviour and communities are being formed in his name.

We have interpreted the religious practices to discover the frameworks behind them. We have noticed the existence of both the Hindu and Christian frameworks. Our evaluation of the movement has demonstrated the success of the movement in the area of inculturation. However, on the question of a successful model of being church, we need further investigations as our criteria implied the inculturation of church. This movement is not a church, as we understand it. Baptism, which constitutes a community into a church, is absent in the movement although there is a strong Eucharistic orientation. Should the *Khrish Bhaktas* not be admitted into the church? By baptising them are we not turning the movement into a means of evangelization, which will be seen as proselytisation (and which will confirm the accusations of the Hindu fundamentalists)? If we keep them as *Bhaktas*, what about their desire to receive the Eucharist? Can this be a model of being church in India? The crux of the problem is the question of baptism and the understanding of membership in the church, which we shall take up in the following chapter.

Chapter 5

The Ecclesiology of the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement: An *Āśram*-Based Charismatic Model

5.0. Introduction

In the previous chapter, we have investigated the *Khrist Bhakta* movement in the area of inculturation. In this chapter, we will explore the hidden ecclesiology of the movement. At the outset, it has to be stated that we are exploring “a way of being church” in which the ecclesiology is hidden. What we have is the living faith. Therefore, we need to excavate the movement to unearth the implicit ecclesiological dimensions. We shall do this by making an exploratory and explicatory study into the nature, structure, and working of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement. The questions of whether, to what degree, and in which respects this movement can be called a model for ecclesia are still unresolved. Before we can take up that discussion or presume to have found a useful model or a way of “being church”, we have to investigate the movement’s ecclesiology. Dulles introduced the term “models” in ecclesiology in order to describe different realizations of being church. He uses this term because Church as a mystery cannot be spoken of directly. He further says that in the case of the Church, “any analogy will never be perfect because the Church as a mystery of grace has properties not paralleled by anything knowable outside of faith”⁹²². In order to speak about the mystery, we need analogies afforded by our experience of the world and these analogies provide us with models⁹²³. “When an image is employed reflectively and critically to deepen one’s theoretical understanding of a reality it becomes what is today called a model”⁹²⁴. At different points of history, different images or models emerged as a kind of key to offer a synthetic vision of the Church⁹²⁵, but none of these models says everything about the Church. However, they each say something, and manifest the development of the Church’s self-understanding at a particular time.

These models are instruments ecclesiologists use in order to reflect and conceive some understanding of the church and, as a result, present a synthetic vision of it. In other words, ecclesiology is the self-reflection of the church on all di-

922 A. DULLES, *Models of the Church. A Critical Assessment of the Church in all its Aspects*, Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1976, p. 23.

923 *Ibid.* pp. 7-8.

924 *Ibid.* p. 21.

925 E.P. HAHNENBERG, ‘The Mystical Body of Christ and Communion Ecclesiology. Historical Parallels’, in *Irish Theological Quarterly* 70, 2005, 3, p. 4.

mensions of the church's being⁹²⁶. It is the study of the church in an effort to understand its nature and mission⁹²⁷. Furthermore, it also has to be recalled that the Second Vatican Council in its two documents on the church – the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen gentium*) and the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et spes*) – gives several descriptions or metaphors of the church such as mystery, people of God, the body of Christ, the community of believers, and sign and instrument for the world. These documents do not promote a single image or metaphor as the central term to describe the church⁹²⁸.

Dulles speaks about two functions of the models in ecclesiology. One is the explanatory function and the other is the exploratory function. On the explanatory level, the models synthesize what we already know about the church, while on the exploratory level they have the heuristic function of leading us to new theological insights or, as Hahnenberg puts it, “offer an accessible pattern for addressing important questions”⁹²⁹. These models are assessed by living out the consequences to which they point⁹³⁰. Since the correspondence of each model with the mystery of the church is only partial and functional, they are inadequate; therefore, the use of a combination of irreducible distinct models is advised. “The models that emerge are an insight into those questions and issues facing the community; they are the shorthand for the concerns of the time”⁹³¹. New models emerge because of their capacity to solve certain problems which their predecessors could not deal with sufficiently.

5.1. The Ecclesiology of the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement

What we are now attempting is a reflection and deliberation about the community of the *Khrist Bhaktas* and its nature, structure, and working, with the primary objective of exploring the ecclesiological vision behind the movement. When we speak about the ecclesiology of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement, we are entering uncharted territory. Although we consider the *Khrist Bhakta* movement as a singular “way of being church”, it is impregnated with several features or dimensions, etc., within its structure and working. These features and dimensions highlight various ecclesiological implications of the movement. We shall present the implications of these features and dimensions in order to make its ecclesiological vision refined and clear. However, these features and dimensions can be squeezed into a two-fold dimension of what we shall call an “*āśram*-based

926 L.S. MUDGE, *Rethinking the Beloved Community. Ecclesiology, Hermeneutics, Social Theory*, Lanham, University Press of America, 2001, p. 8.

927 R. HAIGHT, *Christian Community in History. Vol. 2: Comparative Ecclesiology*, New York/London, Continuum, 2005, p. 17.

928 H. RIKHOF, *The Concept of Church. A Methodological Inquiry into the Use of Metaphors in Ecclesiology*, London, Sheed and Ward, 1981, p. 65.

929 *Ibid.* p. 5.

930 DULLES, *Models of the Church*, p. 24.

931 HAHNENBERG, ‘The Mystical Body of Christ and Communion Ecclesiology’, p. 5.

charismatic model". When we examine the movement, we find that it has combined elements from Hinduism and Christianity. It is centred on the Matridham *āśram* and the concept of the *āśram* has come from Hinduism. The leaders who live in the *āśram* and guide the movement are Christians. The religious practices of *Khrist Bhaktas* come from two sources, namely, the catholicized charismatic Christianity presented to them and Hinduism. The devotees are Hindus and Christians at the same time. Therefore, we have named the ecclesiology of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement an *āśram*-based charismatic model.

First, in order to probe the implicit ecclesiology, we will look at the central institution, the Matridham *āśram* around which the movement has grown and where most religious practices take place. Therefore, we shall begin our exploration by reflecting on the ecclesiology implied in the concept of the *āśram*, followed by a reflection on the specific features of the Matridham *āśram*, its relationship to the local church, and other implications. Moreover, the organization of the movement and the roles played by the guru, the staff members, and by the *aguās* have their ecclesiological importance, and, hence, reflection is called for. Thereafter, we shall reflect on the ecclesiological implications stemming from the Christianity practiced by the devotees. The Christological and Pneumatological basis of this movement will especially be explored. We shall then make an enquiry into the understanding of leadership in the movement based on the idea of charisma, and how it is being practiced. The movement expresses itself in the huge gatherings in the *āśram* and in the prayer meetings conducted in the houses at the local level. Therefore, we shall explore the ecclesiological implications of the gatherings followed by a reflection on the role of healing in those gatherings. This will be followed by an enquiry into the composition or range of the people who make up this movement. Finally, a reflection on some of the smaller aspects inherent in the movement will complete the picture so that we get an overview of the movement's ecclesiology in all its aspects.

These discussions and reflections will lead us to the question of whether this movement can be considered a model for ecclesia in India, which will bring us face-to-face with ecclesiological issues such as baptism and membership. Therefore, we will make a detailed enquiry into the theological, canonical, and pastoral implications of these issues. We shall deal with baptism and Eucharist separately and finally conclude with our reflections.

5.1.1. Ecclesiological Implications of the Matridham *Āśram*

Communal relationships have a spatial dimension in the sense that they are expressed in some visible, localized form⁹³². In the case of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement, the Matridham *āśram* becomes the pivotal centre. The *āśram* is the place where the devotees gather and experience communion. It is a place where

932 RIKHOF, *The Concept of Church*, p. 234.

the atmosphere is basically Hindu while what one experiences is primarily Christian.

5.1.1.1. Implications from the Concept of the *Āśram*

The very concept of the *āśram* is something new to the church⁹³³. It is the most important institution in the *Khrist Bhakta* movement and plays a central role in its identity and working. The attitude of people towards an *āśram* is different from what Catholics normally associate with a parish or monastery. People visit the *āśram* according to need and opportunity. We have also seen that there are many devotees who are not able to come to the *āśram* due to the oppositions of family members, but who attend the village prayer meetings. Thus, the membership and composition of the group is very hazy and fluid, or rather, it has to be stated that membership for the devotees is a non-issue. What is important for them is participation. They participate in the activities albeit in different degrees. This alludes to the concept of an “open church” as proposed by Karl Rahner. Rahner shows that there are very many people who do not belong to the church in terms of the sociology of religion or in terms of citizenship/membership. Yet, many have a positive relationship with the church and so it is difficult to decide who is inside, and who is outside⁹³⁴. The *Khrist Bhaktas* have a positive relation to the church, and in many cases, their faith in Christ and their faith expressions are much deeper than that of many faithful who are members of the church. Thus, we find here quite a few characteristics that answer to an open church and its ecclesiology.

Normally, the Catholic Church manifests itself at the local level in the form of a parish, where the bishop appoints the parish priest. All Catholics at the local level are required to be enrolled or registered in the parish and their attendance at church and obedience of its rules are mandatory. The openness of the *āśram* where people of all *varṇas*/castes are welcomed, the lack of rules and participation without membership, the role played by the human guru, etc., all have implications for the way the movement functions.

5.1.1.2. Implications from Matridham *Āśram*

Unlike the other Catholic *āśrams*, the Matridham *āśram* opened programmes for catering to the devotees⁹³⁵. The contact of the devotees with Christianity happens in this *āśram* milieu. It is in this context that the expression of their Christianity basically happens. The *āśram* is the epicentre both of the divine encounter and the expression of their Christianity. Although they express their religious faith in the context of family prayer and the village prayer meetings, they are modelled after what they see and experience in the *āśram*.

933 See the details about the *āśram* in general and the Catholic *āśrams* in particular in our earlier section 2.3.1.

934 K. RAHNER, *The Shape of the Church to Come*, Trans. Edward Quinn, London, SPCK, 1974, p. 94.

935 See our earlier description of activities conducted in Matridham *āśram* in chapter 3.

In the context of the Matridham *āśram*, what the *Khrist Bhakta* movement first accomplishes is the formation of a *koinonia*. In the name of Christ, a communion of people belonging to several walks of life and *varṇas*/castes is emerging. As we have observed earlier, the *varṇa*/caste system divides the people as high and low based on their birth and no real contact or communion exists between people of different *varṇas*. The history of the Church in India, especially in North India, shows that it is mostly the outcastes and some tribes who have accepted Christianity. Members from the other castes, especially from the higher *varṇas*, kept themselves aloof from the Christian faith. The *Khrist Bhakta* movement is bringing together people of all *varṇas*, high and low. Since the *āśram* has a highly respectable place in India for members of other castes, approaching the *āśram*, even it belongs to Christians, is not a problem. Once people come, they are all considered equal in the movement. Thus, a kind of communion ecclesiology is at work behind the *Khrist Bhakta* movement. This communion is formed by the common desire to receive the fruits of this *āśram*. *Koinonia* is one of the important functions and features of the church. The manner in which the faithful express the relationship becomes relevant to ecclesiology⁹³⁶. It can be stated that the church actualizes itself most fully in the worshipping assembly⁹³⁷. According to Yves Congar, the church first of all is the fellowship of persons in communion with God and with one another; at the same time, the church is also the means by which this fellowship is accomplished and maintained⁹³⁸. The *Khrist Bhakta* movement is contributing to these two aspects. The worshipping assembly of the devotees, which binds those people together who are divided by caste-hierarchy, is a sign of the communion with God and one another and, at the same time, a means for accomplishing and maintaining the fellowship.

Another feature of the community gathered in the *āśram* is its role as a receiving community. The *Khrist Bhaktas* come to the *āśram* primarily to be cured of various kinds of sickness, to receive blessings for themselves and for their family, etc. Their attitude of “receiving” is seen in receiving the Word of God, receiving the blessings, receiving the miracles, receiving the blessed oil and holy water, etc. Whatever the devotees do in the *āśram* is also meant as a receiving of something else. They touch the ground or floor of the *āśram* or of the temple, they touch the feet of the staff, they repeat the Word of God, they sing the hymns and prayers, and carry home the blessed oil and water. These things are all done in order to receive blessings, cures, etc. Just as the faithful in the Catholic Church exercise their royal priesthood in receiving the sacraments⁹³⁹, the *Khrist Bhaktas* approach the *āśram* as a receiving community.

At the same time, another feature of the community gathered in the *āśram* is the anonymity of the group. The gathering in the *āśram* is a huge one where the

936 RIKHOF, *The Concept of Church*, p. 234.

937 HAIGHT, *Christian Community in History*, p. 465.

938 G. FLYNN, *Yves Congar's Vision of the Church in a World of Unbelief*, Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2004, pp. 80-95.

939 *Lumen gentium*, 10.

individuals do not know each other⁹⁴⁰. They come from several places, villages, districts, and states. They do not enter into a deep communion and sharing. Their interpersonal interaction is limited. These gatherings can be more or less compared to an assembly. Even in the case of big Catholic parishes, the Sunday Mass gatherings are similar to assemblies where no familiarity and face-to-face interaction between the faithful exist. The gatherings in the *āśram* also follow this nature.

As we have noted earlier, the *āśram* is not like a Christian monastery or a parish. Positively, it can be compared to a sanctuary or a pilgrim centre. Just as in the case of a pilgrim centre or sanctuary where people come mostly at their own convenience to “receive” what is “offered” there, so also in the case of the *āśram*, people come to receive the gifts offered by the *āśram*. Just as a community or assembly in the sanctuary expresses communion, the assembly or the community gathered at the *āśram* also expresses communion.

5.1.2. Implications from the Organization

The organization of the movement also has its ecclesiological implications. On the one side, the *Khrīst Bhakta* movement is like a loosely defined mass movement. It is spread by the devotees themselves and by word of mouth. We find no rules and regulations for its membership, no initiation rites, no formal disciplines, etc. Everyone is considered as equal and no caste barriers exist to become part of the movement or for taking up any responsibilities and functions within the movement. On the other side, the movement is founded on a strong footing. It is centred on the *āśram*, which is run by the IMS congregation who takes the responsibility for its well-being. The congregation takes pride in the *āśram* and the movement and so ensures that the necessary personnel are provided. The congregation appoints the guru and other members to the *āśram* for its smooth functioning. The movement is led by Anil Dev, who moved to the *āśram* when the movement started to expand. There are some priests, nuns, a head catechist, and other staff members of the *āśram*, who share the leadership and who are appointed or allowed to stay in the *āśram*. Their appointments and arrangements are agreed upon in consultation with Anil Dev so as to guarantee the smooth functioning of the *āśram* and the movement. On the local level, the *aguās* who lead the groups are recognized as *aguās* by the *āśram*-community.

Anil Dev is the most important person in the movement. He plays the dual role of head of an institution and charismatic leader of a movement. For the devotees he is the guru of the *āśram*. The devotees consider him holy and a man of God⁹⁴¹. They want to touch his feet and take his blessings. Although personally

940 In some cases they come to know one another in the course of time.

941 Anil Dev's authority alludes to Weber's conception that the religious communities begin with a charismatic leader. The charismatic leader possesses authority grounded in personal or individual qualities or powers of an extra ordinary kind. See M. WEBER, *The Sociology of Religion*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1963,

he does not encourage people to cling to him, on their part, the devotees flock to him for his blessings. For the devotees this is just a normal cultural practice, but implicitly they still believe that the blessing of the human guru can bring them happiness and fulfil other needs.

For the organization, Anil Dev is the leader of the team and the head of the *āśram*. He is appointed as the head by the authorities of the IMS religious congregation of which he is a member. In addition, the congregation appoints other priest-members of the *āśram*. Here, membership is important in order to become part of the *āśram*. This institution comes within the jurisdiction of the diocese of Varanasi and is bound to follow its general guidelines. Then there are other priests⁹⁴², nuns from different religious congregations, a head catechist, and other staff members in the *āśram*. They share the responsibility in the running of the *āśram* and in the guidance of the movement. In the appointment of these members, the unique position of the *āśram* comes to the fore. Except for the head catechist, all the others are members of one or the other religious congregations or the diocese. They are “allowed” to stay in the *āśram* by their superiors, and the *āśram* or the head of the *āśram* agrees to share with them some form of membership and community in the *āśram*. Once they become members of the *āśram*, they share a well-defined responsibility in connection to the *Khrist Bhakta* movement.

As a team, the staff members work with understanding and loyalty to one another. Every staff member is assigned some responsibilities, there is a division of labour, and every member is willing to fill in for any other person in the event of an unannounced absence. As staff members, mutual trust, cooperation, and loyalty to one another is presupposed. Besides these, at the daily meeting by the staff members for evening prayer and discussion, they discuss the programs for the next day and who will share the responsibilities. These meetings strengthen their cooperation and loyalty to one another.

Finally, from an organizational point of view there are the *aguās* from the village. They are acknowledged as *aguās* by the leadership in the *āśram*. The roles *aguās* play on the *āśram* premises is limited to helping in the distribution of *prasād* or maintaining discipline, etc. Their role in the village is more central as they organize and lead the prayer meetings. However, the actual power of the movement is vested in the hands of guru and the staff of the *āśram*. Thus, the movement stands on the *āśram*, which is founded on a larger base of a religious congregation and the diocese.

pp. 60-61. Weber shows how the validity of the charismatic authority rests on recognition by those subject to it.

942 Sometimes the diocese also sends its priests to the *āśram* as staff members.

5.1.3. Implications from the Āśram and the Local Church

The *Khrist Bhakta* movement has spread to many parts within and outside the diocese of Varanasi. The Matridham āśram is situated within the parish of Benipur of the diocese of Varanasi. The diocese has also started two āśrams to cater to the needs of the *Khrist Bhaktas* where programs for the devotees are conducted. Many devotees attend the weekly prayer meetings in those āśrams while they come to the Matridham āśram for the second Saturday *satsaṅgs*. By coming to the Matridham āśram, they somehow consider Matridham as the “mother house” of the movement.

On the part of the leadership and devotees there exists some kind of a general agreement that the Matridham āśram is the centre of the movement. In the internal organization and leadership of the āśram, priests from IMS congregation and the diocese of Varanasi assist Anil Dev. Nuns from different congregations, especially the Queen of the Apostles, serve the āśram and the movement. The gurus of the other āśrams lived in Matridham before their appointment to their āśrams. The diocese of Varanasi sends its priest-students to this āśram for learning about the *Khrist Bhakta* movement. This āśram is seen as a constitutive element of the movement. It is seen as a place where the diocese and parish, the religious congregations, the laity, and the *Khrist Bhaktas* meet. It is also the place where the Hindu devotees and the Christian religion meet. In short, the āśram is the convergence point between Christianity and Hinduism.

5.1.4. Implications from the Village Gatherings

The *Khrist Bhaktas* gather in the village for weekly prayer meetings. These meetings are the occasions for many devotees, especially for those who are not able or allowed to go to the āśram, to join the movement and to experience and express Christianity. Communal relationships have a temporal dimension, for relationships imply some duration and normally cover a more or less substantial period of time⁹⁴³. By attending the village prayer meetings for a longer period, the devotees develop an identity of a *Khrist Bhakta*. It is the place where they come together in one home, meet with each other face-to-face, and pray together as one small community. Here, they recognize each other, relate to one another, and finally enter into some kind of communion. In the āśram, the gathering is huge and anonymous where mutual interaction and face-to-face contact is limited to a bare minimum. The village prayer meetings are occasions for the devotees to develop and cement their identity as *Khrist Bhaktas* and express it in a concrete manner by interacting with one another. These meetings provide the environ-

943 RIKHOF, *The Concept of Church*, p. 234.

ment, context, and opportunity for a new member to enter into communion with Jesus and with other devotees.

The communion formation in the village context works in two ways. On the one hand, it separates the devotees from the non-devotees, and, on the other hand, it strengthens the bonds among the devotees cementing their separate identity. We also trace some similarities of these house prayer meetings to the house churches as described in the New Testament (1 Cor.16,19, Rom. 16,3-5, Phlm.2 and Col.4,15) where the early Christians met for prayer⁹⁴⁴. The *Khrist Bhaktas* also meet in the villages in the houses mostly of the *aguās* for their weekly prayer meetings. Thus, its ecclesiology also reflects some kind of house church dimension.

Compared to the community gathered in the *āśram*, one of the major features of the community gathered for the prayer meeting in the village is the familiarity and cordiality of the members. They hail from the same village or from neighbouring villages. They know each other by their name and caste. They are familiar with each other's social, economic, and religious background. They recognize each other's abilities, problems, and talents. Their frequent meetings and interaction contribute to their becoming a community.

One of the major features of community gathered in the village is that of sharing. They share their time and companionship. They pray for one another. They express their sympathy, mutual support, and friendship in the sharing of prayers and supporting words. They share with one another their difficulties and problems. Any new member is welcomed and made to feel part of the group. These frequent sharing, support, and mutual interaction bond them as one community.

5.1.5. Implications from the Christianity Presented to the *Khrist Bhaktas*

The type of Christianity presented to the *Khrist Bhaktas* is the catholicized charismatic form of Christianity furnished in the context of the *āśram*. This form of Christianity has found a way to their hearts and minds, captured their imagination, and seems to fulfil their religious needs. It has thus become the meeting point between Hinduism and Christianity. The devotees are appropriating it into their cultural world. Therefore, their religious expressions have features of these charismatic elements and of their original culture. This combination is a unique form, which, ecclesiologically, shows a Christological and Pneumatological character in many of its expressions. Christology and Pneumatology are also the constitutive elements or the roots on which this movement has grown.

944 For further details see V. BRANICK, *The House Church in the Writings of Paul*, Wilmington, Michael Glazier, 1989, pp. 9-13.

The other aspects discussed in this section are the results of the Pneumatological and Christological emphasis. Moreover, the *satsaṅgs* in the *āśram* and the prayer meetings in the villages are contexts and occasions for encountering the divine in Christ and Spirit.

5.1.5.1. Christ as the Unifying Principle

The *Khrish Bhakta* movement as such reflects a strong Christological character. It is in the name of Christ that *Bhaktas* come together and it is in his name that they stay together as one movement. No matter from which village, region, religion, or castes they hail, in the name of Christ they find some kind of mutual common bond. The movement affirms the centrality of faith in Christ and the acting of the movement reflects the witness to the experience of salvation in Christ. People who were formerly divided on a caste basis now stand united in Christ and profess openly their faith in Him. Jesus has become the Guru par excellence.

Faith in Christ has transformed the life cycle of *Khrish Bhaktas*. Their lives reflect the Christological character with spiritual activities done in reference to Christ. Daily lives start with lighting the *diya* in front of Jesus and performing an *ārtī*. Attending *satsaṅgs* on Sundays and second Saturdays has become important. The Annual charismatic convention and Lent become the time for spiritual renewal. The annual Christian feasts such as Holy Week, Easter, and Christmas replace their former religious festivals. Their lives now revolve on the Christological orbit.

The most important change when they became *Khrish Bhaktas* is the acceptance of Christ in the place of family gods. Christ now becomes for them the only saviour. The family god and its icon are removed from the home and discarded at the *āśram* “to be buried under the cross of Christ”, and now Christ’s picture takes the prominent place in the homes. Faith in Christ is what constitutes the people as *Khrish Bhaktas*.

The Word of God becomes the means of meeting Christ as well as guidance for their moral lives. We have seen how the preachers make use of the Bible for their preaching and engage the devotees to repeat the Word of God while preaching. Every *satsaṅg* devotes more than half of its time to preaching, primarily out of the Bible. We have also observed that even some of the illiterate people can quote the Bible (with exact locus) just by listening to the Word of God preached to them. The life of the devotees is disciplined and regulated by the Word of God. Their ethical behaviour is governed by biblical passages or biblical ethics. Thus, the Bible is seen as a place where they can meet Christ and which gives guidance for moral and ethical behaviour.

Adding emphasis to the Christological character, one can observe also the special focus on the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. The adoration of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament is the most important form of devotion for the devotees. It has become for the devotees the “summit” and “fountain” of their lives. The

fervour, passion, and eagerness to have a vision or sight of the Blessed Sacrament, and the enthusiasm to touch the priest or at least his cloak while he carries the Blessed Sacrament in procession, indicate the significance of Blessed Sacrament for *Khrist Bhaktas*⁹⁴⁵. The adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is the most important part of the Sunday and second Saturday *satsaṅgs*. Most of the healings take place at this time. The water and oil are blessed at the time of benediction and it is taken home and used. As they pass by the road, many devotees make a short visit or have a *darśan* of the Blessed Sacrament.

Christopher Ruddy points out the necessity of a Christological emphasis for any healthy ecclesiology. “When reflecting on ecclesiology, it is always necessary to recall that Christ, not the church is the *Lumen gentium*, the light of the nations. He must always be the measure of the church’s activity, and never what is measured”⁹⁴⁶. The Second Vatican Council’s constitution on the church, *Lumen gentium*, teaches that Christ is present to us in His Body, which is the Church, and that he alone is the mediator and way of salvation⁹⁴⁷. In the case of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement, we see that Christ is being made present to the people in the movement. The devotees are able to experience and express their faith in Christ through this movement. Pointing out from the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes*, Ruddy says, “the church - local and universal - exists solely in order to carry on the work of Christ, its Founder and Risen Lord, and so to bring all of humanity into communion with him”⁹⁴⁸. The church has a mediating function. Just as in the case of the church, the *Khrist Bhakta* movement also mediates Christ. In the movement, the prominent place is neither for the *āśram* nor for the village gatherings but for Jesus Christ, and the gatherings in the *āśram* and in the village are contexts and occasions for encountering Christ.

5.1.5.2. The Holy Spirit as the Underlying Principle

The Christianity presented to the *Khrist Bhaktas* is the catholicised charismatic form of Christianity. This form of Christianity sees everything in the life of the church as the gift of the Holy Spirit. The administering or showering of the Spirit does not depend on the recipient’s ability, but is a free gift from God. In the *Khrist Bhakta* movement, the *satsaṅgs* provide a context for encountering the Spirit. All the *satsaṅgs* in the *āśram* and the prayer meetings in the village begin with the invocation of the Holy Spirit. Every *satsaṅg* has hymns, which plead for

945 The Second Vatican Council teaches that Christ is revealed in the Eucharist, in the person of his minister, and in the Eucharistic species. He is present in the Word preached since it is he himself who speaks when Holy Scriptures are read in the church and he is also present in the community gathered in his name. See *Sacrosanctum concilium*, 7.

946 C. RUDDY, *The Local Church. Tillard and the Future of Catholic Ecclesiology*, New York, The Cross-road Publishing Company, 2006, p. 157.

947 *Lumen gentium*, 14.

948 RUDDY, *The Local Church*, p. 157.

the showering of the Holy Spirit, and while singing those hymns the community joins with louder voices, with clapping of hands, and the beating of *kartāl* (4.1.1).

The staff members of the *āśram* gather in prayer on the eve of the Sunday or second Saturday. They use this prayer-time for the “inspiration of the Spirit” to give them the theme for the next day’s preaching and about who will preach. Anil Dev started his ministry of preaching the Word when he experienced the “showering of the Spirit” in such charismatic conventions. He and other members of the staff consider this movement as a gift of the Holy Spirit and a sign of the Spirit’s working. The decisions they take after invoking the Spirit is regarded as authorized by the Holy Spirit. They trust that it is the Spirit that brings the people into communion. Moreover, that Spirit is experienced in the community. The members in the *āśram* believe that the individuals are given the gifts of the Spirit in order to serve the community according to the nature of these gifts. Thus, we could say that the movement reflects a kind of Pneumatological ecclesiology.

These two dimensions, namely, the Christological and the Pneumatological ones, are not to be seen as two independent dimensions. As Roger Haight says, Jesus and Spirit are rather two aspects or dimensions of a divine grounding that operate as one. In the formation of the church, God as the Spirit is mediated by Jesus of Nazareth who is the Christ. Moreover, Jesus can be recognized as the Christ only through the presence and influence of God as the Spirit⁹⁴⁹.

5.1.6. Charism and Leadership

The manner in which the leadership in the community is organized and exercised is also an important aspect of its ecclesiology. We have already seen the role of charisms, which are seen as a gift of the Spirit and their functioning in the organization and leadership. In the villages, the Pneumatological basis of the movement is visible in the manner in which the *aguās* are recognized. The process of discernment of the *aguās* and recognizing them as *aguās* is the concretization of the Pneumatological ecclesiology. Moreover, in charismatic circles, the accent usually has been on the spirituality of the leader rather than on his/her other abilities or skills⁹⁵⁰.

The *aguās* are those who show the abilities of leadership and have the charisma to guide the community and lead them in prayer. The criteria for selection or recognition are not based on caste, social standing, or education but on charism. Those who have experienced some kind of miracles or cures, who are earnest about the faith and show readiness to spread the message of Jesus, and who are devout and faithful are given preference. Therefore, we find *aguās* from different

949 HAIGHT, *Christian Community in History*, p. 115.

950 A. ANDERSON, *Spreading Fires. Missionary Nature of Early Pentecostalism*, London, SCM Press, 2007, p. 260.

varṇas including the *dalits*. Mostly, women show more interest in the matters of religion and its practice, hence, the presence of more female *aguās* than male.

The leadership in the *āśram* does not appoint any one as *aguā*, but recognizes someone as an *aguā*. Once the *āśram* recognizes them as *aguās*, then training is given to them. Therefore, the procedure is not first selecting someone, giving him or her training to be an *aguā*, and subsequently sending him or her a village; rather, it is from the village itself that anyone who shows the charism of leadership and animation is recognized and then trained as an *aguā*. There are many who want to become *aguās* and try to take leadership, but the *āśram* leadership recognizes only those who show suitable attitudes. This process of discernment of the *aguās* and recognizing them as *aguās* can also be seen as the concretization of the Pneumatological ecclesiology. Here, leadership and charism are seen as the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the role of the Spirit in the organization and leadership in order to build up and strengthen the community is seen.

5.1.7. Praying Community

Long hours of the charismatic form of prayer is what the devotees got used to from their association with the *āśram*. Before their association with the *āśram*, they hardly had any experience in prayer, except offering of an *ārṭī* at home or joining the *pūjā* in the temple occasionally. They did not have the experience of a community prayer and, particularly, the charismatic form of prayer. Remember that we had seen earlier that when the neighbours asked the devotees why they prayed aloud, the devotees replied that they were taught (by the *āśram*) to pray aloud. The Christianity they have perceived and experienced is one that has long prayer-meetings inculcating these charismatic elements. Once they became *Khrīst Bhaktas*, they are encouraged to devote time to family prayer daily. Besides the family prayer, they have the weekly prayer in the village for two to three hours, and the weekly *satsaṅg* at *āśram* for more than three hours. Whenever the devotees come together, be it for the weekly *satsaṅgs*, monthly retreats and yearly-convention, or for any special occasion, they spend time in community prayer.

It can be said that the community of *Khrīst Bhaktas* gathers for prayer. These prayer sessions have become constitutive element of the movement so much so that the identity of the devotees as *Khrīst Bhaktas* is manifested in their gatherings in the village and in the *āśram*. These gatherings are always meant for community prayers. Every time the devotees meet either in the village or in the *āśram*, they spend three to four hours in prayer. In the family, after becoming *Khrīst Bhaktas*, they have started to gather together for family prayer. The *Khrīst Bhaktas* have perceived Christianity necessarily as a community which comes together for long hours of prayer. Thus, they understand their community primarily as a praying community.

5.1.8. Healing Dimension

Another important dimension of the Christianity presented to the *Khrist Bhaktas* is the healing dimension. The charismatic form of Christianity emphasizes healings and miracles. When healings and miracles happen witness is given at the gatherings, which is spread by word of mouth, and as a result, more people are encouraged to join the movement. Many people come to the movement for gaining healing of body and mind. Moreover, we have seen the devotees carrying home the oil and water blessed at the time of Benediction and using them as a remedy against evil powers. We had noted the spell of evil spirits on rural populations and their constant fight against these powers (4.2.1). Hearing the miracles and the healings, they join the movement in order to gain the same, however, the healing leads many to discipleship. Thus, the form of Christianity presented to them has introduced Christ primarily as the healer of both mind and body. They experience the community gathering as the major occasion for experiencing that healing. Therefore, the *satsaṅgs* are seen as occasions where the power of God is made present by the mediation of the Sacrament, which is the Body of Christ, or through the priest who is the representative of Christ. We can say that the *Bhaktas* reckon it as a movement that gives those miracles or healings.

5.1.9. Implications from the Composition of the Group

The composition of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement itself speaks about an important aspect of its ecclesiology. In this movement, the members of all *varṇas* come together and are united across the caste/*varṇa* barriers. Once they come to the movement they are taught to love one another following the example of Jesus. There is no hierarchy or honoured position for anyone based on his or her birth. They experience a kind of equal dignity in the movement and enter into a communion, albeit there is room for wider improvement. Christianity, which was considered as the religion of the outcasts, has become instrumental in bringing the people of several castes into communion. Thus, on the one hand, the *Khrist Bhakta* movement has opened up Christianity to the members of other castes/*varṇas* and, on the other hand, it has made possible for people from all castes to worship together. By bringing together people from all *varṇas*/castes, the movement is forming an inclusive community⁹⁵¹ and, therefore, we can say that there is an inclusive ecclesiological dimension in praxis.

5.1.10. Other Ecclesiological Implications

There are some other aspects of the movement in relation to its ecclesiology. They are not present in the movement very significantly, nevertheless some glimpses can be perceived. One of such underlying aspects is the negative attitude towards the members of other religions. Although the *āśram* is open to all religions, the affirmation on Christ as the only saviour sometimes is reflected in a negative attitude towards other religions. Some members think that they are wor-

951 Concerning the gender inclusiveness see the earlier section on charism and leadership.

shipping the real God while members of other religions are worshipping false gods or idols. Thus, although the movement is open to adherents from all religions, those who do not join the movement are seen by them as following wrong paths.

One of the reproaches often made against the charismatic movement and its practitioners has been the indifference they have towards the issues of social justice⁹⁵². The same criticism was raised against the Catholic *āśrams* too⁹⁵³. The *Khrist Bhakta* movement has many elements from the charismatic movement and it is centred on a Catholic *āśram*. Both these dimensions invite similar criticisms against it. Moreover, Hinduism has less stress on *caritas* or *diakonia*, whereas it is one of the important aspects of Christian faith. However, some traces of *diakonia* are observed in the movement. The sharing of grains to the poorest, especially at the time of Lent, is a sign of their *diaconal* dimension, although it has not become a major feature of the movement.

Another dimension of the movement is the roles played by women. In the *āśram*, the guru and the priests lead the movement, but at the local level, the leadership is in the hands of the *aguās*. We have observed that the majority of the *aguās* are women. An overwhelming majority of women also attend the village prayer meetings. Most of the retreats have sessions where women give witness to their experiences. They spread the movement by word of mouth to their friends and other women from neighbouring villages. At *āśram*, nuns and female staff mostly give the devotees counselling and other help. Thus, considering the Indian situation where women have only insignificant roles, we can say that at least in the case of the village context the women play a greater role in this movement.

We have made a short exploration of the ecclesiology implied in the organization of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement, especially the concept of *āśram*. Furthermore, we have excavated the ecclesiological implications from the type of Christianity practiced by the *Khrist Bhaktas*. We have also looked at other ecclesiological implications stemming from the composition of the group, the healing dimensions, charism and leadership, the nature of the community, etc. The ecclesiological dimensions of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement have become clearer in its two-fold aspect of an *āśram*-based charismatic model. Avery Dulles had pointed out that images or models must be deeply rooted in the corporate experience of the faithful to be effective⁹⁵⁴. The organization and conduct of the movement with all its fluidity and its successful appeal to the people suggest that the model is rooted in the experience of people in general. On an organizational level, it presents to the church a new ecclesiological model. The very concept of the

952 P. HOCKEN, *The Challenges of the Pentecostal Charismatic and Messianic Jewish Movements. The Tension of the Spirit*, Farham/Burlington, Ashgate, 2009, p. 69.

953 See the details of the criticism in our earlier section on the *āśram* in 2.2.4.

954 DULLES, *Models of the Church*, p. 19

āśram with its implications is something new to the church. Dulles also spoke about the capacity of models to lead to new theological sights when used in an exploratory or heuristic way⁹⁵⁵. The *āśram* model leads one to focus on the spiritual aspects of Christianity. Its openness will invite people of all religions and cultures. Its simplicity will attract ordinary people to Christianity. Christianity can thus become a symbol of communion for people of all religions, all cultures, and all economic standards. The implications from stressing the charismatic elements, especially the Christo-Pneumatology and the composition of the movement, can lead us to new theological meanings. Normally, the *āśram* is considered as a place for higher *varṇas* and for people of higher levels of spirituality. However, the stress on charismatic elements has brought the ordinary people and the high spiritually-oriented people under one umbrella. The Christo-Pneumatological stress has advantages. As Amalorpavadass say, for Christians, God is trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The presence and action of God through Word and Spirit happens in all creation, in varied ways. Nevertheless, this is manifested to us Christians in Jesus. Jesus is the manifestation of the mystery of God. Therefore, Jesus is indeed Christ but Christ is more than Jesus is⁹⁵⁶. However, as a point of caution, the focus on the Christology and Pneumatology is to be complemented with a stress on Trinitarian ecclesiology. Moreover, the fluidity of the movement shows that the margin between who is part of the movement and who is not is thin and grey. There are also other unclear areas on the organizational level, such as the formation of an *āśram*, the appointment of a guru, and the selection of an *agūā*, etc. At present, this model shows promises of becoming a successful one in India considering its context. However, any model can be judged only after it is lived out for a sufficiently long period of time.

The Catholic faith teaches that through baptism, human beings enter the Church⁹⁵⁷, which enables them to offer spiritual sacrifices⁹⁵⁸ and to participate in the church's liturgical life⁹⁵⁹. Baptism constitutes the church while the Eucharist sustains it. The *Khrist Bhaktas* do not receive baptism although they long to receive the Eucharist. The church does not allow them into the Eucharistic communion as they are not baptised. Why do the devotees not receive baptism, accept the membership in the church, and enter into the Eucharistic communion? Why are the leaders in the movement withholding baptism and the Eucharist from them? Without a baptismal practice, can we call the *Khrist Bhakta* movement a model of ecclesia? It is imperative that we make a study of baptism and Eucharist in the context of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement.

955 *Ibid.* p. 23.

956 AMALORPAVADASS, 'Is Christ the Unique Saviour? A Clarification Question', in E. D'LIMA & K. GONSALVES (eds.), *What Does Jesus Mean?, What Does Jesus Christ Mean?. The Meaningfulness of Jesus Christ amid Religious Pluralism in India*, Bangalore, Indian Theological Association, 1999, p. 12.

957 *Lumen gentium*, 14.

958 Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam actuositatem*, 3.

959 Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum concilium*, 14 & *Lumen gentium* 10 & 11.

5.2. Baptism and Eucharist in the Context of the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement

5.2.0. Introduction

The Catholic tradition understands sacraments as “efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the church by which divine life is dispensed to those who receive them. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions”⁹⁶⁰. In other words, they are “perceptible signs (words and actions) accessible to the human nature. By the action of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit the sacraments make present efficaciously the grace that they signify”⁹⁶¹. The church teaches that by His power Christ is present and his power is operative in the sacraments. They are also the concrete expressions of faith of the church. The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify human beings, to build up the Body of Christ, and, finally, to give worship to God. Because they are signs, they also instruct⁹⁶². Sacraments have something that is visible. At the same time, they effect grace, by which they transform the people⁹⁶³. Additionally, while imparting grace, the very act of celebrating them most effectively disposes the faithful to receive the grace in a worthy manner so as to worship God duly and to practice charity⁹⁶⁴. The Catholic Church has recognized seven sacraments. However, it was considered from the very beginning of the church that “the gateway to all the sacraments is baptism, and in the order of significance, it is the Holy Eucharist that is at the core of the whole sacramental system”⁹⁶⁵.

The church believes that God wants all human beings to be saved. She sees herself as a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God and of the unity of all humankind⁹⁶⁶. The church invites everyone to its fold since the church believes that the salvation offered by God in and through Jesus Christ is present visibly in the Church. Hence, the membership in the church is seen as a definite and assured means of salvation. Thus, the necessity of baptism as an assured means for salvation is a constant teaching of the Catholic Church⁹⁶⁷. The *Khrist Bhaktas* do not receive baptism but long to receive the Eucharist (see details in 4.1). The church does not accept them into the Eucharistic communion since they are not

960 *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1131. See also K.W. IRWIN, ‘Sacramental Theology’, in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia* 2nd ed., Vol. 12, Detroit, Gale, 2003, pp. 465-479.

961 *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1084.

962 *Sacrosanctum concilium*, 59.

963 M. WALSH, *Roman Catholicism*, p. 106.

964 *Sacrosanctum concilium*, 59.

965 L.S. CUNNINGHAM, *An Introduction to Catholicism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 102.

966 *Lumen gentium*, 1.

967 *Lumen gentium*, 14.

baptised. Moreover, the leaders of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement do not preach baptism but faith in Christ. We have a dilemma or impasse where the devotees are eager to receive the Eucharist while their admittance to the Eucharistic communion is impeded by their not being baptised. Baptism is not advocated by the leaders; nor are the devotees eager for it. Hence, the following questions emerge immediately. Why are the *Khrist Bhaktas* not coming forward to receive baptism? Why are the leaders not advocating baptism to the devotees? How do people in general in India understand baptism? Is it possible for the devotees to be considered as members of the church without being baptised? Are there instances where non-baptised persons are considered as members of the church? Is it possible to enter into full Eucharistic communion without being baptised? Can there be a different form of church where faith in Christ and the expressions of faith in Christ are sufficient or the norm, and baptism and membership are not demanded as essential? Can we call the movement a model of ecclesia in the absence of baptism of its members?

We start this section with a primary note on the process of admitting new members to the Catholic Church and proceed to investigate the diverse views of devotees on baptism. Diverse opinions also can be seen among the leaders about the baptism of the *Bhaktas*. Henceforth, we shall make an enquiry about the motives of the leaders for not baptising the devotees and their motives when allowing some exceptions. These enquiries will prompt us to make an investigation into how people in India in general understand the Christian baptism. A clear discernment of baptism as understood in India, which seems to be the crux of our discussions, will clarify to a certain extent the major difficulties for the present predicament. This will be followed by an enquiry into the Catholic understanding of Baptism. We shall make a short historical overview of baptism to find out how the early Christians understood baptism. Since the early Christians and the *Khrist Bhaktas* are in a similar minority position we shall probe into the relationship of the early Christians after baptism with their former religion and culture. This will guide us to an inspection of the changed understanding of baptism and membership in the church as Christianity became the official religion of the State. These investigations will guide us to make an enquiry into the different ways of becoming members in the church. The study of the practice of catechumenate in the Church as an intermediary stage for entering the church will prompt us to make a comparison of catechumens and *Khrist Bhaktas*. Our enquiry will reveal the attitude of the church towards the catechumens who are accepted as members of the church even though they are not baptised. This situation gives us a platform to discuss the various possibilities and roadmaps for the future course of the devotees put forward by the leaders and those involved in the *Khrist Bhakta* movement. We shall explore possibilities for considering the devotees as members or quasi members of the church. Resolving the issue of membership will help us in looking for and finding possible solutions for admitting the devotees without baptism into Eucharistic communion for which they hunger.

Henceforth, the forthcoming section will be devoted to the discussion on Eucharist.

5.2.1. *Baptism in the Context of the Khrist Bhakta Movement*

Who may receive baptism in the Catholic Church? Any adult⁹⁶⁸ who wishes to enter the church is received by the church through a process as envisioned in the *The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. Since the beginning of the Church, adult Baptism is the common practice where the proclamation of the Gospel is still new⁹⁶⁹. The adults are admitted to the church after a process of faith formation. The first stage in this process is the stage of catechumenate in which the candidate is given pastoral and religious formation and guidance in the Christian life. Once the training is done then the celebration of the sacrament of initiation is administered in which the candidate declares to renounce sin by rejecting Satan and his works, and professes the Catholic faith. It is followed by the celebration of confirmation in which the newly baptised is anointed with the chrism and the Holy Spirit is invoked upon him during the imposition of hands. The initiation is completed by the celebration of the Eucharist and the reception of the Eucharistic gifts by the newly baptised Christian.

5.2.1.1. Views of Devotees on Baptism

To be a Christian, it is assumed that it is necessary to face the consequences of joining the church. The way to join the church is by baptism. In Christianity, baptism is seen as an act of witness and a sign of commitment to Christ. However, baptism is understood differently in India. Among the devotees, we find divergent opinions and diverse attitudes towards baptism (more details in 4.4.3). Depending on their attitude towards baptism, we have classified them into four groups. The first group of devotees are those who want to come as close as possible to Christ and want to receive the Eucharist, but who consciously keep away from baptism since they want to remain within the community of Hinduism. The second group of devotees are those who want to enter the Christian fold, but who are afraid of their family and friends who oppose their becoming Christians. The third group of devotees are those who are not aware of the need to be baptised as they are not told about its necessity, and who think that what was required of them was becoming devotees of Christ and following His teachings. The last group of devotees are willing to leave the Hindu fold and become Christians but

⁹⁶⁸ In the Catholic Church, a minor after the completion of his or her seventh year is considered as capable of moral responsibility. Therefore, he is considered as having achieved the age of reason or the age of discretion. See *Code of Canon Law* numbers 11 and 97.2. While *The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* is meant for the adults, it accepts minors who have attained the age of reason and whose parents are supporting their intention to be initiated in the initiation programme. We exclude the topic of child baptism, as it is not relevant in this context.

⁹⁶⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1247.

the leaders are not admitting them to the church. We shall now discuss the views of each group in detail.

The first group of devotees wants to receive the Eucharist, but rejects baptism since they want to remain within the community of Hinduism. Under this category, we find at least three different kinds of attitudes towards baptism. The first kind of attitude is mostly from devotees who are from the higher *varṇas*. For a good number of them, to be a Christian is to betray their community and their family. Moreover, it will result in a painful expulsion from their caste and shamefully being counted among the *dalits*. Remember that family ties are very strong in India. It is family, caste, and society which give identity to the people. According to Anil Dev, such devotees are torn between their commitment to Christ and their commitment to their family and friends. The second kind of attitude from the devotees who consciously keep away from baptism is that they think baptism is an unnecessary step. For them what is essential is accepting Christ as their Lord, which they have already done. There are cases when such devotees went to some non-Catholic churches where they were asked to be baptised. These devotees thereupon left such churches and came back to the Catholic *āśram* where baptism is not advocated. They think that accepting Jesus as the Lord is fundamental whereas leaving their community is an unnecessary evil. For them membership in the church and becoming a baptised Christian is not something positive. The third kind of attitude is from those devotees who feel that joining the church would make them bound to the rules of the church. The church has many rules, like regular Sunday attendance, belonging to a parish, etc. They think that abiding by these rules is not needed for their religious and spiritual life. The motivation of all these devotees for not leaving the Hindu fold is internal.

The second group has a lot of similarity to the first group but they do not accept baptism for fear of their family and friends who oppose their becoming Christians. Many such devotees have had to face opposition and persecution from their immediate family members for going to a "Christian" *āśram*. However, they were tolerated since they did not become Christians and did not abandon their Hindu customs and culture. Nevertheless, these devotees know that their relatives, family members, and the village community are against their becoming Christians. As long as these devotees stay in the fold of Hinduism and follow the cultural traditions, they will be tolerated. Because of the prevailing threat to their lives, they do not seek baptism. Remember that it is the community which holds the key for identity and survival in India. Thus, the motivation for the second group not to leave the Hindu fold is external.

The third group of devotees are those who are not aware of the need to be baptised. These devotees are not told about the necessity of being baptised. What was required of them was accepting Jesus as the only saviour, becoming his devotees, and following his teachings. The content of what is preached in the *āśram* is not baptism, but faith in Christ and a life of discipleship. The staff and

leaders of the *āśram* preach the Word of God and encourage the devotees to repeat it so as to make it their own. They are asked to live by the Word of God. Since baptism is not presented to them as a condition for being a devotee, many of them do not think of accepting baptism.

Then there is a fourth group of devotees who are willing to be baptised but the leaders in the movement are not keen on baptising them. These devotees are willing to leave the Hindu fold and to be counted as Christians. Such devotees call themselves Christians and try to display their faith publically. Among them, the majority come from the lower castes who might be happy to leave the Hindu fold and join Christianity. Among them are a few who aspire to leadership roles and try to play the roles of *aguās*. Nevertheless, the leaders of the movement do not show any enthusiasm in baptising them.

5.2.1.2. Views of Leaders on Baptism

It is important to find out why the *Khrist Bhaktas* are not baptised by the leaders involved in the movement. We had in our earlier section (see 3.11) described the vision of the leaders about the future course of the movement. These visions present us with their attitude on baptising the devotees. We have seen that the gurus, the priests, and nuns working in the *āśrams* run by the diocese are against baptising the devotees. Most priests in the diocese and the leaders of the IMS community are not encouraging baptism of the devotees⁹⁷⁰. The bishop of the diocese sees the future of the devotees as both devotees and as Christians. Instead of repeating their vision, we shall summarize in the following pages their reservation or apprehension in baptising the devotees. After presenting their fears, we shall present the meaning of baptism and bring to light the theological reasons latent in their reservations.

5.2.1.2.1. Baptism will stop their spiritual thirst

All the leaders directly involved in the *Khrist Bhakta* movement are of the opinion that by giving baptism the devotees will lose their interest in the matters of faith and will have less enthusiasm for the Word of God. It will, on the one hand, kill their spiritual growth and, on the other hand, make them long for economic gains and demand benefits such as admission of their children to hostels and schools run by the diocese.

Baptism is an initiation into eternal life in Christ as well as into the church, which is his Body gathered and animated by the Spirit. Besides being incorporated into the Body of Christ, baptism in its true spirit has to be the starting point of a spiritual journey towards Christian discipleship. It has to be the outward ex-

970 It is interesting that those who are not working with the devotees, especially the young priests, suggest baptism as the better option for the devotees.

pression of a growing inward commitment to Christ and his values. Strengthened by the Spirit the baptised enter more deeply into a (horizontal) relationship with one another and a (vertical) relationship with Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. It is the beginning of turning away from all that is sinful and of a new life in Christ. The leaders of the movement, from their experience, tell us that baptising devotees works in the opposite way. They notice an opposite effect than what is intended in the Catholic understanding of baptism. Therefore, in order to keep up the enthusiasm of the devotees for the Word of God, to preserve their commitment to Christ, and to keep alive their fervour for spiritual life, or, in other words, to preserve the spiritual significance of conversion, the leaders choose not to encourage baptising the devotees.

We have seen that some exceptions were made. A few devotees have been allowed to be baptised. In those instances, the leadership made sure that the devotees are part of the *āśram* community and not of the parish. Those baptised now participate in the activities of the *Khrish Bhaktas*. They continue to live and conduct themselves as *Khrish Bhaktas*. Remember that we have seen how the baptised devotees in the other two *āśrams* kept themselves away from the prayer meetings meant for the devotees and attended only the Eucharistic celebration on Sundays.

5.2.1.2.2. Baptism will affect the catholicity of the Church

To be baptised into the community, which is the body of Christ, is also a sociological experience. Although baptism is an entry into the mystery of Christ, it is realized in the local community. It is in the local community that the initiated are being given access to the universal church⁹⁷¹. The Christian faith has to remain open to all diversities of the human race by virtue of its catholicity. It shall not be limited to any particular group or caste. The Christian mission intends to call all men and women to participate in the very life of God. As Cesare Baldi says, “it (the mission of the church) is to make everyone participate in the life of the Father, to overcome the divisions arising from sin, to reunite everyone in a single family, a community, where everyone remains himself but also participates willingly in the unique life of God”⁹⁷². *Lumen gentium* defines the Church as the sacrament of unity for the human race⁹⁷³. However, the leaders of the movement point out that, traditionally, only the *dalits* have accepted Christianity in this part of the world. As a result, there is a general misconception in India that Christianity is for the lower castes, *dalits*, and the simple folks.⁹⁷⁴ Once baptism is giv-

971 L.G. WALSH, *The Sacraments of Initiation*, London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1988, p. 299.

972 C. BALDI, ‘The Mission of the Church. To Gather into One the Scattered Children of God’, in K.J. BECKER & I. MORALI (eds.), *Catholic Engagement with World Religions. A Comprehensive Study*, New York, Orbis Books, 2010, p. 281.

973 *Lumen gentium*, 9.

974 M. SUDHAKAR, ‘Apologetics in a Hindu Context’, in R.E. HEDLUND & P.J. BHAKIARAJ (eds.), *Missiology for the 21st Century. A South Asian Perspective*, Delhi/Chennai, ISPCK/MIIS, 2004, p. 468.

en, only the *dalits* will turn up to this movement and the people of higher castes will turn away from the movement⁹⁷⁵.

Thus, baptising only the *dalits* will keep the other *varṇas* away from Christ and do harm to the catholicity of the Church. Christ and his message are meant for all the groups and in Christ there should be no difference between people of different origin. The Church is a community with the capacity to embrace people of varying cultural backgrounds into one fellowship. In the *Khrist Bhakta* movement, members of all *varṇas* are united in the name of Christ and baptism will divide the people in the name of Christ. Hence, reservation in administering baptism is seen as a positive choice and a positive witness to reach the members of all castes and to prevent the identification of Christian faith with only one group, namely, *dalits*.

5.2.1.2.3. Baptism will invite the wrath of Hindu fundamentalists

As we have seen earlier, the Hindus perceive religion as a way of life adopted by the community rather than the adoration of a particular God⁹⁷⁶. Therefore, they see baptism as a proselytizing activity of the church and oppose vehemently any conversion of Hindus into Christianity. They think that the spread of Christianity would spell the ruin of the Hindu community (see 2.3.1). By baptising the devotees, the leaders will give the Hindu fundamentalist groups a cause for alarm and a case for proving their suspicion right. We have seen earlier that the Hindu fundamentalists were opposing the movement, but as the leaders did not baptise the devotees, the opposition is lying silent. Once the devotees are baptised, then the dormant opposition will rise again outraged and it will be detrimental for the movement.

Baptism is not intended to break the internal cohesion of the Hindu culture and Hindu community. It is true that the Christian faith brings prophetic challenges to every culture to remove negative features and elements that oppose justice. Thus, it shall oppose the negative or evil tendencies in every culture. However, the Christian mission is not directed against any religion or culture. The spirit of Christ is meant to inspire every culture and the catholicity of the Church becomes fuller by entering into all religions and cultures. The Christian meaning of baptism is misunderstood in India. If rightly understood, baptism will be a public witness of one's faith in Christ and this public declaration of the faith should work as an encouragement for others to take the Christian faith seriously. Instead, in the present context baptism is seen as detached from faith and under-

975 The levelling principles of Christianity are repugnant to caste ideas. Men attracted by Christian ideals were not willing to accept the same social position with converts from the depressed classes, whom they had regarded as inferior all their lives. See for details, S.M. PATHAK, *American Missionaries and Hinduism. A Study of their Contacts from 1831 to 1910*, Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal Oriental Publishers and Book Sellers, 1967, p. 245. However we do not advocate that the levelling principles of Christianity be compromised.

976 V. KUNDUKULAM, 'Conversion and Evangelization', in *Indian Theological Studies* 38, 2001, 2, p. 204.

stood as a means of negating the Hindu community and culture. On the contrary, the *Khrist Bhakta* movement, by not advocating baptism, attracts people to Jesus Christ. Baptising the devotees is instrumentalizing the movement for conversion, which will attract the wrath of the Hindu fundamentalists, which in turn will prove fatal to the movement, and the spread of faith in Jesus Christ in this part of the world. By opting not to baptise the devotees, the leaders are keeping alive the faith in Christ and giving opportunity for people to come to Christ. This option of the leaders presents Christianity in a positive light and not as a culture intended on destroying and negating the culture of the people. Hindu fundamentalists now cannot accuse the Church of being an agent of Westernization.

5.2.1.2.4. Baptising is breaking the devotees away from their communities

The majority of the leaders of the movement point out that by baptising the devotees they are plucking them away from their community. Anil Dev had mentioned that he does not want to put further burden on the *Bhaktas* who have already suffered much physically and psychologically to become *Khrist Bhaktas*⁹⁷⁷. According to him, their admittance to the Church will invite further physical and psychological pressure and segregation. He also points to the mental pain of the high caste Hindus who want to remain a disciple of Christ and at the same time do not want to be socially and culturally cut off from their communities. The leaders are aware of the conversion-experience of the *Bhaktas* and their commitment to Christ. However, they consider baptism as inappropriate in the cultural context because it implies converting between communities rather than a conversion of personal orientation⁹⁷⁸. They do not like to pull the devotees out from their culture and community. This break from the community is much more disastrous than just a change of religion. "In India the individual is thought of always in a family setting. Contacts are maintained with kin far beyond the immediate family, and some obligation is owed even to distant kin"⁹⁷⁹. In India's community-oriented society where individuals and families find the caste or religious group as their basic frame of reference, breaking from one's community has serious sociological consequences. When disconnected from their relationship they lose their identity. In India, the identity of one's self is not in contrast to the other but in relation to the other. It is a relationship that defines identity⁹⁸⁰. Evangelisation that has been practiced in India and is still practiced in some places is carried out at times in the form of proselytization. As the final statement of the Eleventh Annual Meeting of the Indian Theological Association observes, often conversion to Christianity does not bring about a qualitative change in the

977 The local bishop also says that no violence should be done to the way of peoples' living the Christian message.

978 R.W. TAYLOR, *Acknowledging the Lordship of Christ. Selected Writings of Richard W. Taylor*, Delhi, ISPCK, 1992, p. 94.

979 B.P. LAMB, *India. A World in Transition*, London, Pall Mall Press, 1963, pp. 152-153.

980 F. WILFRED, *Sunset in the East?*, Madras, Chair in Christianity University of Madras, 1991, p. 236.

converts ethically and socially⁹⁸¹. The statement also shows the negative impact of evangelization on some of the tribal communities, which were marked by communal harmony before evangelization and became at times divided after evangelization, thus producing results that are contrary to the very Gospel.

Faith in Christ should lead to community building and not to the breakup of communities. "The promotion of unity belongs to the innermost nature of the Church, for she is, thanks to her relationship with Christ, a sacramental sign and an instrument of intimate union with God, and of the unity of the whole human race"⁹⁸². The effort of evangelization and sharing of Christian love is directed towards building up a fellowship in Jesus Christ⁹⁸³. One comprehends another human being by sharing his language, his logic, his mentality, his expressions, his manner of life, his environment and his worldview. What gives identity, uniqueness, and rootedness to a people is their culture. Evangelisation is directed neither against a culture of the people nor against the fabrics of the community. It is aimed at persons in their social and community relationships⁹⁸⁴. As Pope Paul VI says, "What matters is to evangelize man's culture and cultures (not in a purely decorative way, as it were, by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots), in the wide and rich sense... always taking the person as one's starting-point and always coming back to the relationships of people among themselves and with God"⁹⁸⁵. Edward C. Pentecost stresses the importance of preserving the culture for the purpose of evangelization when he says that it is through culture that religion is practiced. Culture for him is that reference point which gives direction to life. If those reference points are destroyed, man is left to drift on a sea of insecurity. To destroy culture then is to destroy a way of life or design of living. Therefore, to divest human beings of their culture is to place them into a vacuum where they find only frustration⁹⁸⁶. Therefore, it is important to make sure that evangelization does not take people out of their culture. Therefore, Pope Paul VI says, "Every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelization of culture, or more correctly of cultures"⁹⁸⁷. The mission of the church implies that it takes each culture seriously and involves and engages seriously with each of these cultures⁹⁸⁸. Instead of breaking any culture, efforts should be made to incarnate Jesus in each of them in a spirit of mutual and reciprocal enrichment. For more details about the importance of culture for the peo-

981 The final statement of the Eleventh Annual Meeting of the Indian Theological Association (1987), in S. ARULSAM Y (ed.), *Communalism in Indian. A challenge to Theologizing*, Bangalore, Claretian Publications, 1988, p. 11.

982 *Gaudium et spes*, 42.

983 A. KAROKARAN, 'Evangelization and Community Building. Some Theological Reflections', in G.H. AMBOOKEN (ed.), *Mission and Community Building, National Seminar, Bhopal*, Bhopal, CMI-CMC Publications, 1990, p. 142.

984 L. BOFF, *New Evangelization. Good News to the Poor*, New York, Orbis Books, 1991, p. 88.

985 *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 20.

986 E.C. PENTECOST, *Issues in Missiology. An Introduction*, Michigan, Baker Book House, 1982, p. 79. See also BOFF, *New Evangelization*, p. 5.

987 *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 20.

988 J. KAVUNKAL, 'The Identity of the Indian Church', in *Third Millennium* 4, 2001, 4, p. 10.

ple, see our earlier discussion (2.2.1.2) on the concept of inculturation in Indian theology.

Baptism is a process of experiencing the Lord leading to communion on horizontal and vertical planes⁹⁸⁹. If baptism in the present context plucks devotees out of their culture, negates, and destroys it, then we are breaking the very root by which they live. Therefore, the leaders, by choosing not to baptise the devotees, are in fact preserving them in their community by maintaining its integrity, safeguarding culture, protecting the selfhood of the community, and preserving the identity and rootedness of the devotees⁹⁹⁰. By this, the leaders also treasure and preserve the Word-in-creation. As Anto Karokaran says, the coming of the Word into history does not jettison the Word-in-creation as used up and bypassed⁹⁹¹. He shows how the Word-in-creation exists in the religions, cultures, and social genius of people and in their cultural and national identity⁹⁹². Additionally, by choosing not to baptise the devotees the leaders also uphold the ability of the Christian faith to incarnate into every culture. The universality of the Christian faith is to find its fulfilment in the particularity of the culture and not in negating the culture.

5.2.1.3. Baptism as Understood in India

It is also important to clarify how the Indians in general view Christian Baptism, as the Christian and Hindu understanding of it is different. What is the difference between an insider's view and an outsider's view and what are the implications?

In general, baptism in India is not seen as a sign of commitment or faith in Christ but rather as a sign of discarding one's own culture and community. The Hindu understanding of baptism stems from their understanding of religion, community, and culture. Hindus grasp the very idea of religion differently. They perceive religion inherently as a way of life adopted by community and not as a religion⁹⁹³. Being a Hindu is primarily a matter of maintaining one's cultural

989 J. KAVUNKAL, *To Gather Them into One*, Indore, Satprakashan Sanchar Kendra, 1985, p. 213.

990 It is also true that everything in the culture is not God-given nor is any culture a perfect one. The dehumanizing elements in culture are against the Gospel values. Hence, a critique of the culture is necessary. See more details about the importance of protecting the selfhood of the communities in T. MENAMPARAMPIL, 'Conversion. The Cultural Dimension', in *Mission Today*, 10, 2008, p. 28.

991 A. KAROKARAN, 'Proclaiming Jesus' Uniqueness in the Context of Cultural Nationalism', in *Third Millennium* 7, 2004, 4, p. 54.

992 He presents the complementarities of the Word-in-creation and Word-in-history and shows how they are related as part of the same divine plan. *Ibid.*

993 E.D. DEVADASON, *Christian Law in India. Law Applicable to Christians in India*, Madras, DSI Publications, 1974, pp. 342-345. However it does not mean that Hinduism lacks religiosity. It is impregnated with the idea of holy. It has developed well several spiritual paths. However, Hinduism is not able to make the theological differentiation between culture and religion as in the case of Christianity. In the ancient world, whether in the West or East, religion was intertwined with kinship (ethnicity) and politics (cities, kingdoms, empires). Christianity in the West acquired this differentiation slowly. See E. FEIL, 'The Problem of defining and demarcating 'Religion'', in E. FEIL (ed.), *On the Concept of Religion*, Trans. B.

identity within the Hindu group. This also includes maintaining and fulfilling one's duty (*dharma*) pertaining to one's caste and stage of life. Membership in the Hindu community is not based on professing any definite creed. Remaining within the group and fulfilling one's duty, a Hindu is free to worship according to the religious beliefs of one's choice. On the spiritual level, a Hindu is free to believe in what he likes; on a social and cultural level he is not. Spiritual allegiance to Jesus Christ, however intense it maybe, is not regarded as a stain on a person's standing as a true Hindu⁹⁹⁴. As S. Radhakrishnan, the former Indian President and philosopher says, "Hinduism is more a way of life than a form of thought. While it gives absolute liberty in the world of thought, it enjoins a strict code of practice. The theist and the atheist, the sceptic and the agnostic may all be Hindus if they accept the Hindu system of culture and life"⁹⁹⁵. For them, a formal conversion from one religion to another is unnecessary. What is essential for one's soul is conversion from the baser to nobler sides of one's personality⁹⁹⁶.

Being a Hindu does not depend on practicing religion but is a matter of social belonging. A Hindu can remain a genuine Hindu even if he worships none of the Hindu gods. According to the general Hindu understanding, people can belong to any religion. Professing a particular religion is insignificant. One is free to choose one's own spiritual path. A Hindu is one who belongs to a particular community, not related to his personal faith in his religious systems. He is more of a "social animal" aiming for personal spirituality rather than one concerned about religious systems⁹⁹⁷. On the social level, the Hindu society is organized and has a strong hold over its members. They consider the traditional patterns as coming down through centuries as a treasured possession⁹⁹⁸. Hindu society is regulated and fashioned while religion is not organized. In contrast, Christianity as a religion is well organized⁹⁹⁹. However, we cannot speak of a Hindu religion in the sense in which we speak of the Christian religion. The difference can easily be grasped by comparing the situation of an expulsion of a person in Hinduism and Christianity. If a Christian is expelled from his church, another group may be ready to accept him because the organised religion cannot exercise its influence beyond its limitations of religion. In Hindu society an ex-communicated person

MCNEIL, New York, Global Publications, 2000, pp. 1-36. The author by his three-volume work *Religio*, Gottingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986, has shown that the usage of *religio* as a term for worship practice rather than a system of belief persisted everywhere until the early modern era. See also D.E. OAKMAN, 'Culture Society and Embedded Religion in Antiquity', in *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, 35, 2005, pp. 4-12. See for more details our earlier discussion on the Hindu worldview (4.6.1).

994 H. STAFFNER, 'Conversion to Christianity Seen from the Hindu Point of View', in M. DHAVAMONY(ed.), *Evangelization, Dialogue and Development*, Roma, Universita Gregoriana Editrice, 1972, p. 236.

995 S. RADHAKRISHNAN, *The Hindu Way of Life*, London, Unwin Books, 1956, p. 55.

996 T.M.P. MAHADEVAN, 'The Christian Image in India', in H.E. HOEFER (ed.), *Debate on Mission. Issues from the Indian Context*, Madras, Gurukul Theological College & Research Institute, 1979, p. 302.

997 D. BHARATI, *Living Water and Indian Bowl*, p. 49.

998 MENAMPARAMPIL, 'Conversion. The Cultural Dimension', p. 22.

999 Christianity holds to certain essential articles of faith. The Christian faith can be inserted into any social or cultural life of a people in any parts of the world. It can take flesh in any society while maintaining its essentials of faith.

has either to repent and return or to leave that society and village¹⁰⁰⁰. On the religious sphere, freedom is given to the individuals while it is required of the people to subordinate themselves to the status quo of the social structure¹⁰⁰¹.

We can find some sort of similarity between this particular situation and the situation of church and society in Europe in the Middle Ages when the identification of the church with the organized society was a distinguishing feature¹⁰⁰². At that time, Christianity in the West knew a similar identification of religion and culture. Christianity alone was seen as “religion” while other practices were seen as heretical. However, the church was not seen simply as a religion but rather as a category of thinking and a way of life. It was in the 17th century, following the fragmentation of unity and authority of the Roman Church, that the earliest systematic attempts at producing a universal definition of religion were made¹⁰⁰³.

Today, when we speak of conversion, what is grasped by a Hindu and a Christian is fundamentally different. The Hindus grasp the very term religion differently. “The word ‘religion’ is not a native category”, says Jonathan Z. Smith. “It is not a first person term of self-characterization. It is a category imposed from the outside on some aspects of native cultures. It is the others... who are responsible for the content of the term”¹⁰⁰⁴. Often the term *dharma* and religion are used interchangeably. The word *dharma* has quite a different meaning from what people in the West understand by religion. Nicholas Lash shows how the English-speaking people in the 19th century had presumed that there must be some word in every language that corresponds to the sense in which the word “religion” is used. He says that, as a result, the word *dharma* was mistranslated as “religion”, which guaranteed the intractable misunderstanding between Indians and English-speaking Westerners¹⁰⁰⁵. Hindus use the term *dharmantar* (change

1000 BHARATI, *Living Water and Indian Bowl*, p. 48. Here one might point out that on the social level Hinduism behaves as totalitarianism, while leaving the religious sphere free. Any kind of totalitarian system invites a critique of the Gospel.

1001 Brahamabandav Upadhyaya had made the distinction between *samāj dharma* (way of life) and *sādāna dharma* (means or way of salvation). Being a Catholic by religion means the following of a certain way of salvation, accepting Jesus Christ as the way to God, our Father. A human being is Catholic precisely because he follows the Catholic way of salvation. In Hindu terminology this means that the Catholic religion is a *sādāna dharma*. But the Catholic religion is not a distinct *samāj dharma*: it does not prescribe any distinct way of life as regards social customs, diet, inter-dining, ritual purity, etc. Being a Hindu, on the other hand, does not mean following any specific *sādhana dharma*, any specific way of salvation. A Hindu is free to choose any ‘*mārg*’ or way of salvation, i.e., *sādāna dharma* that appeals to him although he is bound by the *samāj dharma*, by rules regarding diet, ritual purity, and various forms of social behaviour. See for further details STAFFNER, ‘Conversion to Christianity Seen from the Hindu Point of View’, pp. 241-243.

1002 R.W. SOUTHERN, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*, London, Penguin Books, 1970, p. 16. However, we do not equate the situation and do not consent to the view that as the situation in Europe changed with Enlightenment; similarly, the identification of Hinduism and Indian culture will change with the advancement of science.

1003 T. ASAD, ‘Anthropological Conceptions of Religion. Reflections on Geertz’, in *Man* 18, 1983, 2, p. 244.

1004 J.Z. SMITH ‘Religion, Religions, Religious’, in M. TYLOR (ed.), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 269.

1005 N. LASH, *Holiness, Speech and Silence. Reflections on the Question of God*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2004, p. 12.

of *dharma*) to denote the conversion of Hindus to Islam and Christianity. In addition, they consider that there is nothing spiritual about *dharmantar*; it is only proselytism. Hindus do not object if their members undergo a change of heart and believe in Jesus Christ¹⁰⁰⁶. However, they object to the change of *dharma*. Hindus do not consider conversion as something that is related to the spiritual sphere but as “the step by which a person changes his social community”¹⁰⁰⁷.

Thus, in the context of India, as M.M. Thomas has pointed out, baptism is not seen primarily as a sign of incorporation into Christ but as a sign of proselytism into a socio-political-religious community involving rejection of their socio-political-religious communities¹⁰⁰⁸. It is a social and a civil event. By baptising a Hindu person as Christian, he/she ceases to be a member of the Hindu community. “Far from being purely a spiritual event, a spiritual rebirth, baptism implies the changeover to and the renunciation of a person’s social community in favour of a new and different social group - a step that is not only alien to the Hindu mind but also fraught with far-reaching legal and social consequences”¹⁰⁰⁹. Because of baptism, the convert is socially speaking, considered as an outcast from his social group and family. He is forced to leave his joint family and has to find his own property and an independent family. This change legally brings him or her under Christian Personal Law and affects matters such as succession, marriage, maintenance, guardianship, and adoption¹⁰¹⁰. Unlike in most countries where the law of succession or law concerning inheritance, property, etc., is a national law and all citizens are ruled by the same law, in India each community has its own distinct law. The British introduced the Christian Personal Law, which is regarded by many as a European law. Therefore, the convert to Christianity changes from Hindu Personal Law (read it as being Indian) to Christian Personal Law (read it as being European). Thus, a convert changes over from one social group to another legally and he or she has to follow the laws regarding marriage and inheritance of the community to which he or she has moved¹⁰¹¹.

Historically, when the Muslim rulers invaded India (occupation of Delhi in 1193), they brought *sharia*. The conquerors attempted in a number of ways to suppress Hinduism as a religion¹⁰¹². Their progress was very slow and could not convert most parts of India. “They found out that the Hindu religion which was

1006 See our earlier discussion of the Hindus view of spiritual life in 3.1.5.4., especially the *karm mārṅ* which stipulates fulfilling one’s *dharma* pertaining to one’s stage of life and caste.

1007 STAFFNER, ‘Conversion to Christianity Seen from the Hindu Point of View’, p. 237.

1008 M.M. THOMAS, ‘Baptism, the Church and Koinonia’, in M.M. THOMAS (ed.), *Some Theological Dialogues*, Madras, The Christian Literature Society, 1977, p. 115.

1009 STAFFNER, ‘Conversion to Christianity Seen from the Hindu Point of View’, p. 235.

1010 J. SALDANHA, *Conversion and Indian Law*, Bangalore, Theological Publication in India, 1981, p. 115. Conversion affects the cohesiveness and unity of Hindu family and community.

1011 He cannot inherit anything from his family and ceases to belong to Hindu community. See for the details and history about how the Christian Personal Law came into being and its other implications, *ibid.* pp. 14-23.

1012 They destroyed temples and idols, even killed some people. They gave incentives of higher positions to the converted, etc. See for details LAMB, *India. A World in Transition*, pp. 40-42.

interwoven with the laws and manners of the people exercised an irresistible influence over their very thoughts¹⁰¹³. They needed to rule a large population that had been thoroughly antagonized¹⁰¹⁴. In order to rule over them, the Muslim rulers had to come to some sort of compromise with the communities in India. They found out that the Hindus possessed a sort of passive courage to resist changes in their social and political organization. Furthermore, the Muslim rulers needed the support of the Hindus to fill the lower positions on their staffs and to rule the vast land¹⁰¹⁵. Therefore, they did not impose the Islamic law as such to the non-Muslims majority who were Hindus and who were under smaller local kingdoms¹⁰¹⁶. Only the Muslims were ruled by *sharia* while allowing the Hindus to be ruled by their own rules and customs. The Muslim rulers dominated the political scene while the Hindu *zamīndārs* (landowner) remained the masters of rural India¹⁰¹⁷.

The kings adopted a policy of compromise and moderation. They paid lip service to the *sharia* and admitted their sinfulness if they were unable to enforce any of its provisions. ... And if the traditional customs of people were against the *sharia*, they allowed them to override the *sharia* under the designation of *urf*¹⁰¹⁸.

When the Portuguese took control of parts of India, they had left all juridical administration to the Hindus¹⁰¹⁹. Later when the British became the rulers in India, they tried to impose the English law to all the subjects. They considered the British law as the perfect law for any society although it showed little or no concern for the rights and reasoning of the non-Europeans¹⁰²⁰. Soon they realized that the English law did not fit the Indian conditions. Therefore, they emulated the model followed by the Islamic rulers and allowed the Muslims to be ruled by the Islamic law while allowing the Hindus to be ruled by the traditional Hindu law¹⁰²¹. But then there was the instance of those converted to Christianity. In 1863 in a judgement, Lord Kingsdown, Her Majesty's Privy Council, stated:

1013 J.S. GREWAL, *Muslim Rule in India*, London, Oxford University Press, 1970, p. 140.

1014 LAMB, *India*, p. 41.

1015 GREWAL, *Muslim Rule in India*, p. 140.

1016 J.D.M. DERRETT, *Religion, Law and the State of India*, London, Faber and Faber, 1968, p. 279.

1017 R.A. KHAN, 'Muslims in Medieval India. A Historical Sketch', in Z. IMAM (ed.), *Muslims in India*, Delhi, Orient Longman, 1975, p. 14.

1018 M. HABIB, *The Political Theory of the Delhi Sultanate*, Delhi, Kitab Mahal, 1958, p. 137. The term *urf* means to know, which refers to the customs and practices of a given society. The Islamic tradition says what the people, in general, consider as good is also considered as such by *Allah*.

1019 DERRETT, *Religion, Law and the State of India*, p. 279.

1020 J.E. FALKOWSKI, *Indian Law/Race Law. A Five Hundred-Year History*, New York/London, Praeger, 1992, p. 6.

1021 H. STAFFNER, *Jesus Christ and the Hindu Community. Is a Synthesis of Hinduism and Christianity Possible?*, Anand, Gujrat Sahitya Prakashan, 1987, p. 239.

Upon conversion of a Hindoo [Hindu] to Christianity the Hindoo [Hindu] law ceases to have any continuing obligatory force upon the convert. He may renounce the old law by which he was bound as he has renounced his old religion or if he thinks fit he may abide by the old law notwithstanding he has renounced the old religion¹⁰²².

This ruling however allowed the converted to stay within the Hindu law or to leave it.

Later, the British felt the need to provide a law of inheritance for the European residents in India, for Anglo-Indians¹⁰²³, and for those Indian Christians who were not inclined to remain under the Hindu Law¹⁰²⁴. In 1865, they enacted the Indian Succession Act, which applied the English law to all the Indians except the Hindus (including Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs) and Muslims. The Muslims and Hindus are exempted from the Act not because they profess a different faith, but because they possess a law of succession of their own¹⁰²⁵. There were further acts, cases, modifications, etc.¹⁰²⁶. Accordingly, any Hindu who accepts the Christian faith and is baptised ceases to be a member of his social group and family. He loses his right to inheritance, any privileges meant for his caste, like reservation in jobs, and cannot be ruled by the Hindu Personal Law. To be precise, on conversion to Christianity, a *dalit* ceases to be treated as a *dalit* by the State for the purpose of either educational or employment opportunities. He is thus disfavoured because he has accepted Christianity¹⁰²⁷. However, on the social level he will continue to be discriminated and disfavoured as a *dalit*. Thus, although Christians regard baptism purely as a spiritual and a religious event, it is seen and understood in India as a social and a legal event with its economic and cultural consequences.

Understanding the Hindu view on baptism does not necessarily call for accepting their view on baptism. As we shall see in the following section, in the early Christian centuries, the Christians made a distinction between religion and politics. They accepted the Roman dominance in the political sphere, while keeping their freedom on the spiritual level. They tried to differentiate between politics and religion although they did not succeed. For the rulers in antiquity at that time, being a Roman citizen meant accepting the Roman customs and culture,

1022 SALDANHA, *Conversion and Indian Law*, p. 95. The present researcher added what is in the parentheses.

1023 Anglo-Indians are those who have mixed Indian and British ancestry. At present the term denotes any person whose father or any of whose other progenitors in the male line is or was of European descent but who is domiciled within the territory of India and is or was born within such territory of parents habitually resident therein and not established there for temporary purposes only. See for details, V.S. GAIKWAD, *The Anglo-Indians. A Study in the Problems and Process Involved in Emotional and Cultural Integration*, Bombay, Asia Publishing House, 1967. To know more about their lives, character, culture and way of life, see G.J. MOORE, *The Anglo-Indian Vision*, Melbourne, AE Press, 1986, pp. 1-70.

1024 STAFFNER, *Jesus Christ and the Hindu Community*, p. 240.

1025 SALDANHA, *Conversion and Indian Law*, p. 101.

1026 See for details, *ibid.* pp. 101-136.

1027 DEVADASON, *Christian Law in India*, p. 71.

part of which was offering homage and sacrifice to the statues of kings. However, the western worldview of antiquity and the present Hindu worldview are not to be equated. Nevertheless, there are some similarities on the level of a cultural system understood as a “holy whole”, adherence to which is required. Dismantling the social system is not permitted while one is free on the level of spiritual and political sphere.

The crux of the problem is the heterogeneous understanding of baptism. Christians and Hindus have a different understanding of religion, community, and culture¹⁰²⁸. Christians are inclined to project their notion of religion on Hinduism though it does not fit it, while Hindus are inclined to project their notion of the spiritual path on Christianity though it does not fit it¹⁰²⁹. Christians do not intend the negative social, legal, and communal consequences of baptism. They do not intend to break up the community by baptism but want the community to grow spiritually and be united in the name of Christ. Christians stress the spiritual level while allowing sufficient freedom on the social level. Hindus oppose the social aspect of baptism, while leaving freedom on the spiritual level. This distinction paves the way for some possibilities of mutuality between Hinduism and Christianity. This distinction poses the question of whether it is possible to have a synthesis of Hindu social life and Christian spiritual life. Is membership in the Catholic Church and membership in the Hindu community mutually exclusive? Why should baptism necessarily estrange the recipients from their community and culture? If baptism is perceived as estranging the recipients from their community and culture, should we advocate baptism?

These questions bring forward the discussion on the real meaning of baptism. Does Christianity know of similar dilemmas from its history? The early Christians were a minority in a non-Christian world. How did the early Christians understand baptism in relation to their socio-cultural lives? Did baptism lead them to an automatic renunciation of the culture they inherited and step into a new subculture called Christianity? The present situation of the *Khrist Bhaktas* shows some analogy with the early Christianity, as the *Khrist Bhaktas* are also a minority amidst a vast non-Christian population. The response of the early Christianity in relation to its socio-religious background might be helpful for our purpose and for our situation. Therefore, looking at the history of baptism and its meaning might open up some window for the Indian context.

5.2.2. *Baptism in Changing Cultural Contexts*

1028 *Ibid.* p. 71.

1029 STAFFNER, ‘Conversion to Christianity, seen from the Hindu Point of View’, p. 247.

The Catholic Church understands baptism as the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit, and the door that gives access to the other sacraments¹⁰³⁰. By baptism, human beings are made members of Christ and belong to his body, the church¹⁰³¹. The word baptism is derived from the Greek verb *baptizein* (βαπτίζειν) which means to “plunge” or “immerse”. Thus, by the rite of baptism one enters into water, which symbolizes the burial of the receiver into Christ’s death, from which he rises up as a new creature with Him in his resurrection. Christians believe that baptism was instituted by Christ and has to be celebrated with water using the proper formula. In the early Christianity, the ecclesial meaning of baptism was stressed while in later times, baptism was understood predominantly as a means of receiving redemption by the washing away of the original sin into which every human being is born. Nevertheless, in the modern times, baptism is seen less as a washing away of original sin. *Lumen gentium* envisages baptism as a means through which the faithful are reborn as children of God and are incorporated into the church¹⁰³². The stress now is on initiation into the church. Alternatively, to be more precise, it is part of the rite of initiation, which includes confirmation and reception of the Eucharist¹⁰³³. This is how generally it is practiced in the case of adult baptism. In short, it can be summarized that according to the Catholic faith, “all stain of sin is removed in the baptism; that the person is born again as a child of God; such a person is illuminated by the grace of baptism and is incorporated in the mystical body of Christ which is the Church”¹⁰³⁴.

On a sociological level, baptism results in the formation of a community. Those baptised are now members of the church. It affects their relationship with their earlier community. There is some continuity and some discontinuity at the same time. In the history of Christianity, the first century Jewish Christians were in a situation where they shared some continuity from their earlier community as well as some discontinuity. They were not the majority in the society but a minority. This minority situation of the Jewish Christians is comparable to the situation of the *Khrist Bhaktas* in India who are a minority too. How did these early Jewish Christians understand baptism in relation to their parent society and did it affect their relationship to Judaism? What things differentiated them from the Jews who did not accept baptism and become part of the new community?

1030 *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1213. See also *Lumen gentium*, 14. The Second Vatican Council mentions the intrinsic connection between baptism, confirmation, and the Eucharist as constituting together the full initiation into the Christian life. See *Lumen gentium*, 11. We do not elaborate more on the theology of baptism but present a bare minimum description for our purpose. For more details about the meaning of baptism, J. NEUNER & J. DUPUIS, *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, New York, Alba House, 2001, pp. 575-602, and K.B. OSBORNE, *The Christian Sacraments of Initiation. Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist*, New York, Paulist Press, 1987, pp. 11-79.

1031 *The Decree for the Armenians of the General Council of Florence* (1439), see NEUNER & DUPUIS, *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, p. 582.

1032 *Lumen gentium*, 14.

1033 WALSH, *Roman Catholicism*, p. 109.

1034 CUNNINGHAM, *An Introduction to Catholicism*, p. 105.

The early Christians also had to deal with Hellenistic culture. What cultural relations did affect the non-Jews when they joined the Christian community? In the following section, we shall explore the understanding of baptism of the early Jewish Christians in relation to their cultural life in the society. First, we will attempt to find out how the early Christians understood baptism in relation to their parent society in the sense of inculturation and “de-culturation”. Second, how did they understand baptism in relation to their salvation? Third, how did they relate membership of the church and baptism?

5.2.2.1. The Early Christian Understanding of Baptism

Baptism was the common practice among the early Christians as a means of entering the community of followers of Jesus. It seems that they based their practice of baptism on the divine command as presented in the Gospel of Matthew 28, 19 and on the example of Jesus himself who was baptised by John in the waters of the Jordan¹⁰³⁵. The Gospels tell us that John baptised Jesus in Jordan. The disciples of Jesus also baptised people. Jesus sent out his disciples with the commission to baptise people. Moreover, the Jewish roots of Christianity and its practice of ritual bathing may also have bearing on the rite of baptism. All these must have set something of a pattern for the subsequent way the disciples baptised in the name of Jesus after Christ’s death and resurrection¹⁰³⁶.

However, the Christian baptism was distinguished from John’s in its call for faith in Jesus, its being administered in Jesus’ name, and in its connection with the Holy Spirit¹⁰³⁷. Even when water was used, it was understood as a function of the Spirit¹⁰³⁸. Christians believed that through baptism one achieved the bestowing of the eschatological gift of the Holy Spirit and gained the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2, 38-40). Baptism was also a means of incorporating them into the company of those redeemed by Christ. Acceptance of the proclamation about what God had done in Jesus meant joining a community whose reason for existence was faith in Jesus as the mediator of salvation¹⁰³⁹. So, baptism was seen as an efficacious actualization of the redemptive work of Christ¹⁰⁴⁰.

Additionally, the early followers of Jesus understood baptism spiritually as a symbolic reference to their participation in the death of Jesus in order to begin a

1035 E. FERGUSON, *Baptism in the Early Church*, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009, p. 853.

1036 WALSH, *The Sacraments of Initiation*, p. 67.

1037 FERGUSON, *Baptism in the Early Church*, p. 853.

1038 A. KAVANAGH, *The Shape of Baptism. The Rite of Christian Initiation*, New York, Pueblo Publishing Company, 1978, p. 27.

1039 A.Y. COLLINS, ‘The Origin of Christian Baptism’, in M.E. JOHNSON (ed.), *Living Water, Sealing Spirit. Reading on Christian Initiation*, Minnesota, The Liturgical Press, 1995, pp. 50-51.

1040 F. BOVON, ‘Baptism in the Ancient Church’, in *Sewanee Theological Review* 42, 1999, p. 436. However, in the early Christianity, there was lack of uniformity concerning the order in which the reception of the Holy Spirit, imposition of hands and baptism occur. See for details, T.M. MANSON, ‘Entry into Membership of Early Church’, in *Journal of Theological Studies* 48, 1947, 189-190, p. 25.

new life with the resurrected Christ¹⁰⁴¹. The central aspect of baptism is this relationship to Jesus, and as seen in the writings of Paul, it is even a mystical relationship, participating in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (Romans 6, 1)¹⁰⁴². Besides the formation of the resultant community in the name of Jesus, baptism possessed three functions, namely, forgiveness of sins, conferral of the Spirit, and establishing a relation to the coming Jesus Christ¹⁰⁴³. It can be said that in early Christianity baptism was understood as an eschatological reality, binding believers to the eschatological person of the Messiah and to one another.

When we look at the Palestinian Jewish Christian community, the acceptance of baptism affected the relationship to their parent community. It is clear that they remained a part of the earlier or larger cultural community participating in the rituals and customs of the larger community while exclusively coming together to celebrate their newly found faith in the Messiah. Thus, remaining inculturated in the larger community, they came together exclusively for celebrating their new found faith. They were a Spirit-filled community living by apostolic teaching, celebrating the Eucharist at home and joining the petitionary prayer in the synagogue¹⁰⁴⁴. The apostles and the Jewish followers of Jesus attended the temple, kept the Law of Moses, and continued to follow the Jewish social customs. They practiced circumcision and observed the Jewish dietary laws. They continued to belong to their Jewish religion and community. We have a glimpse of this continuity in the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles as explained by Pathrapankal:

The Christians went to the temple of Jerusalem during the times of prayer (Acts 2,46 & 3,1) because they felt that their new faith did not involve a break with their past; but rather a completion and fulfilment of their ancient religion. Some even considered this group as a sect, the sect of Nazarenes (Acts 24,5), similar to the sects of Sadducees (Acts 5,17) and Pharisees (Acts 15,5)¹⁰⁴⁵.

Both the followers of Christ and the Jews believed in the one God of Israel, claimed the same Holy Scriptures, and espoused a similar moral code. It seems that the followers of Jesus never felt that by baptism they had alienated themselves from their parent Jewish religion and its beliefs and practices.

1041 J. GROENEWALD, 'The Foundation, Value and Meaning of Baptism in the New Testament', in *HTS Theological Studies* 59, 2003, 2, p. 371. See also G. THEISSEN, *The Primitive Religion of Christians*, London, SCM Press, 1999, pp. 129-130.

1042 OSBORNE, *The Christian Sacraments of Initiation*, p. 60.

1043 G. STRECKER, *Theology of the New Testament*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2000, pp. 286-287.

1044 KAVANAGH, *The Shape of Baptism*, p. 22.

1045 J. PATHRAPANKAL, 'Communities without Cultural Alienation', in *Third Millennium* 2, 1999, 3, p. 12. See also W.A. MEEKS, *The Moral World of the First Christians*, Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1986, pp. 110-113.

A similar view is echoed by Aidan Kavanagh pointing to the fact that the conversion to *Christos-Messiah* undoubtedly produced a society of persons that was in marked contrast to all others¹⁰⁴⁶. But he asserts that neither the New Testament nor the apostolic tradition to which its era gave rise offer any sustained evidence that such a conversion de-culturalized the convert or de-socialized the church. Despite certain deracinating effects which adherence to the *Christos-Messiah* certainly produced, there is no reason to think that the earliest Christian communities thereupon forsook their Jewishness or even their continued attendance at Jewish worship events (Acts 3, 1; 17,10)¹⁰⁴⁷. On the contrary, the Christian community at Jerusalem, while preparing for the Day of the Lord, remained staunch observers of the Law. They strongly believed in the future coming or return of the *Messiah* Jesus. They prayed for his speedy return. Their faith in His second coming and their faith in the fulfilment of Jewish expectation in Jesus did not take them out of the main Jewish traditions¹⁰⁴⁸. Although they embraced the Christian faith, they still considered themselves as members of not only Jewish society but also Jewish religion¹⁰⁴⁹.

Were Christians perceived by the non-Christians as part of Jewish society or as a separate entity? The Roman civil authorities considered Christianity in the beginning as a sect of Judaism. The early Christians in some places even claim Jewish social and political rights for themselves. Everett Ferguson shows that the Roman authorities did not just distinguish Christianity from Judaism but allowed them to share the legal protection of Jews¹⁰⁵⁰. They even treated the complaints of Jews against Christians as internal problems. The Jewish identity gave the Christians initial protection from Roman authorities. The book of Acts closes with Paul in Rome quite “openly” preaching about Jesus Christ, which was not objectionable under the Roman law¹⁰⁵¹. At the same time, Christians also had to share the negative attitude towards the Jews. “Gentile distaste for Jewish exclusivism, resentment of Jewish privileges, hostility to Jewish ambition, and later suspicion of Jewish loyalty - all these affected attitudes towards Christians and were transferred to them to some degree at one point or another”¹⁰⁵². The Jewish society in the beginning considered the Christians as part of their society. There was not much to differentiate between the Jews and Christians, and the Christians were not even called Christians. Both were Jews sharing much more than what they disagreed on. Synchronously, the faith of Christians in Yahweh had a new

1046 KAVANAGH, *The Shape of Baptism*, p. 23. A variety of Jesus movements emerged all as part of Judaism. For details see M. HENGEL, *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1980.

1047 KAVANAGH, *The Shape of Baptism*, p. 23.

1048 V. MARTIN, *A House Divided. The Parting of the Ways between Synagogue and Church*, Mahwah, A Stimulus Book, 1995, p. 118.

1049 P. KALLUVEETIL, ‘Churches’ with the Church?, in *Third Millennium 2*, 1999, 1, p. 42.

1050 FERGUSON, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, p. 602.

1051 K. BEDIAKO, *Theology and Identity. The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and Modern Africa*, Oxford, Regnum Books, 1992, p. 19.

1052 FERGUSON, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, p. 609.

orientation, lived in their new ethical life according to the vision of Jesus. So conversion and baptism gave the converted a new vision of life. The Christians did not break away from their parental community and culture but gave a new impetus to it until the Jews in the Council of Jamnia or Yavneh expelled them from the Jewish community and synagogues¹⁰⁵³.

How did the Christians understand their baptism in relation to salvation? The Christians believed that through baptism they became part of the God's elect people. They saw themselves as the people of the covenant who were the recipient of the promises made to their ancestors. They understood the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as an eschatological event and a new act of God's love¹⁰⁵⁴. This new act of God offered salvation and deliverance through Jesus. Those who accepted this offer formed into a community by receiving baptism. Through baptism, in the name of Jesus, new members were added to them who received the Spirit as a pledge. They believed that the Spirit that was to be poured out at the end had brought them gifts of tongues, the ability of prophecy, worked miracles, etc.¹⁰⁵⁵. Helmut Koester says that the early Christians had enthusiastic consciousness of the possession of the Spirit¹⁰⁵⁶. What made them different as the followers of Jesus was their faith in Jesus as the Messiah, and this faith they exercised and experienced in the breaking of bread, which they performed in their own inner circles¹⁰⁵⁷. As years went by, the breaking of the bread gained a pride of place in their communal devotion. Besides presenting Christianity as the fulfil-

1053 It is generally believed that the Council of Yavneh, allegedly convened by Rabban Gamaliel II around 90 CE, expelled the Christ-believers and the Jews and Christians parted ways and only a severed relationship remained between Jews and Christians. See G. DIX, 'The Ministry in the Early Church', in K.E. KIRK (ed.), *The Apostolic Ministry. Essays on the History and Doctrine of Episcopacy*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1964, p. 228. See also F. MANNS, *John and Jamnia. How the Break Occurred Between Jews and Christians c.80-100 A.D.*, Jerusalem, Franciscan Printing Press, 1988, pp. 25-26. However, many scholars question this singular parting of ways. It is now considered that there were many 'partings' and that these partings happened in several places at different times in various ways. In several places, especially outside the Roman Empire, the Jewish and Christian communities continued to be intertwined in complex ways at certain times. F.J.E. BODDENS HOSANG's Doctoral thesis *Establishing Boundaries. Christian-Jewish Relations in Early Council Texts and the Writings of the Church Fathers* (2008) defended at Tilburg University has demonstrated the continued close contact between Christian faithful and their Jewish neighbours at least until the sixth century. See also for further details, A.H. BECKER, 'Beyond the Spatial and Temporal Limes. Questioning the Parting of Ways outside the Roman Empire', in A.H. BECKER & A.Y. REED, *The Ways that Never Parted. Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2003, pp. 373-392. Even after the so-called parting of ways the mutual interaction between Christians and Jews continued to exist and scholars now point to the repeated efforts by certain Christians to discourage others from adopting Jewish practices, frequenting synagogues (JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, 'Discourses against Judaizing Christians', Transl. P.W. HARKINS, *The Fathers of the Church*, Washington, Catholic University of America Press, 1979.), and even calling themselves Jews. See for details, J. LIEU, *Image and Reality. The Jews in the World of the Christians in the Second Century*, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1996, pp. 39-56. There was also pressure from gentile Christianity to get separated from Judaism. See D. BOYARIN, *Border Lines. The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004, pp. 57-73.

1054 F.M. CROSS, *The Ancient Library of Qumran*, London, Sheffield Academic Press, 1995, p. 184.

1055 H. KOESTER, *History and Literature of Early Christianity*, New York/Berlin, Walter De Gruyter, 1995, p. 87.

1056 *Ibid.*

1057 PATHRAPANKAL, 'Communities without Cultural Alienation', p. 12.

ment of the Jewish longing for the *messiah*, as a religion, it offered high ethical standards, a close-knit social community, the authority of an ancient sacred scripture, and a rational worship¹⁰⁵⁸. Christian faith made genuine interpersonal relations possible based not on blood, but on a common spirit shaped by the spirit of God. They went to temple with one heart, and with the same oneness of heart, they started to live and act¹⁰⁵⁹. They kept their ethnicity, followed their practice of circumcision and other food-laws. They continued to live their Christian faith from within Judaism.

When Christianity moved from a Jewish background¹⁰⁶⁰ to the Hellenistic background, it had a different context¹⁰⁶¹. How did the Christians relate their baptism to that society and experience inculturation or de-culturation in relation to their faith? In the Hellenist world, religion was essentially a corporate thing or community matter. "Otherworldliness did not form the main trunk of the tree. The deities that were worshipped were those presiding over the affairs of life, and there was a very material view of gifts to the deity"¹⁰⁶². For the Greeks and Romans, religion was primarily a question of corporate or communal practice and closely interwoven with culture. Orthodoxy was not a major concern. They believed in the existence of several gods. The Roman state normally had no trouble in incorporating a new religion into its systems¹⁰⁶³. Worship, even giving one's exclusive devotion to a deity, did not preclude the acknowledgement of other deities. Thus, for Romans, the exclusive monotheism of the Christians which ruled out any other veneration of the divine besides their own was impious and ungodly¹⁰⁶⁴. As Christianity entered the Hellenist world, there was mutual influence¹⁰⁶⁵. By the second century, Christians used the treasure chest of Greek culture and philosophy¹⁰⁶⁶. They claimed all spiritual insights and moral virtues in the society for the Christian faith and defined the Christian community by its religious

1058 FERGUSON, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, p. 618.

1059 MARTIN, *A House Divided*, p. 51.

1060 We do not discuss the Hellenistic-Jewish background, as our overview is very brief, broad, and general.

1061 Mostly it is called a Hellenist Roman context where the majority are non-Jews. However, not all the scholars agree on the difference between the Jewish and Hellenistic contexts. Raymond E. Brown argues that Jewish culture and Hellenistic culture were not mutually exclusive milieus and, consequently, a distinction between a Jewish and a gentile Christianity on cultural or even theological terms is a false one. See for details, R.E. BROWN and J.P. MEIER, *Antioch & Rome. New Testament Cradles of Catholic Christianity*, New Jersey, Paulist Press, 1983, pp. 1-9.

1062 FERGUSON, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, p. 149.

1063 J.S. JEFFERS, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era. Exploring the Background of Early Christianity*, Illinois, Inter Varsity Press, 1999, p. 105.

1064 P. LAMPE, 'Early Christians in the City of Rome. Topographical and Social Historical Aspects of the First Three Centuries', in J. ZANGENBERG & M. LABAHN (eds.), *Christians as a Religious Minority in a Multi-cultural City. Modes of Interaction and Identity Formation in Early Imperial Rome*, New York/ London, T&T Clark International, 2004, p. 28. See also FERGUSON, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, p. 1173.

1065 The symbiosis of paganism and Christianity was alive even after Christianity became the official religion of the empire. Even in the sixth century, the pagan spirit and secular traditions of the city of Rome tenaciously survived in the Italian aristocracy under a thin Christian surface. See for more details, LAMPE, 'Early Christians in the City of Rome' pp. 30-32.

1066 *Ibid.* p. 28.

convictions and its effect on conduct¹⁰⁶⁷. The Christians from the Greek Diaspora translated the Gospel from Aramaic to Greek in order to preach it to the Greeks. The very fact that the Gospel had to be translated from Aramaic to Greek had its importance; new words, new notions came in¹⁰⁶⁸. In Christianity, the Hellenistic influence is seen in dogma, theology, and devotion. Moreover, rational and mystical elements enter Christianity through Hellenism¹⁰⁶⁹.

Following the Pauline understanding, Hellenistic Christianity saw baptism as a sacrament of dying and rising, thus sharing in the experience and destiny of the crucified and risen Lord¹⁰⁷⁰. For Hellenistic Christians (also for Palestinian Christians) baptism meant the entry into the covenant community of Jesus. However, the debate and discussions concerning circumcision as a condition for admitting the non-Jews to this new covenant community resulted in the bringing together of the idea of baptism and circumcision¹⁰⁷¹. The prophetic idea of circumcision of the heart took the place of physical circumcision. In other words, baptism was seen as the Christian circumcision incorporating women and men, slave and master, Greek, Jews and gentiles into the new people of God. This was a new faith that was open to all nations. Nevertheless, the implications of baptism are not from the circumcision rite of Judaism but from the cross-resurrection of Jesus¹⁰⁷².

However, this new understanding resulted in far-reaching consequences and the fast growth of the church in the non-Jewish areas around the world. "By deciding that a pagan who wanted to be a Christian did not have to become a Jew first, the church opened its doors and became a place where anyone could enter and live at ease while maintaining his or her culture and customs"¹⁰⁷³. The path to membership clearly illustrates the difference between Judaism and Christianity. Christianity is not a covenant between God and a nation as in the case of Judaism. However, it is between God and a group of individual believers united by their personal relationship to the risen Jesus. In Judaism, it is birth which makes a boy a son of a covenant and forever a Jew. Any child born to Jewish parents is

1067 BEDIAKO, *Theology and Identity*, p. 37.

1068 E. VON DOBSCHUTZ, 'Christianity and Hellenism', in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 33, 1914, 4, p. 250.

1069 *Ibid.* p. 259.

1070 Paul mentions in his second letter to Corinthians (11, 24) that he received 39 lashes from the Jewish authority. Paul's receiving this punishment implies his continued inclusion in a Jewish community. There would be no reason to discipline an apostate or an outsider with this particular punishment. See for details, C. SETZER, *Jewish Responses to Early Christians. History and Polemics, 30-150ce*, Minneapolis, Augsburg Fortress, 1994, p. 16.

1071 E. FERGUSON, 'Spiritual Circumcision in Early Christianity', in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 41, 1988, pp. 485-497. The Christian tradition has found many features that typify baptism as the initiation rite of the New Covenant. And yet it is not a rite of tribal or cultural initiation. See WALSH, *The Sacraments of Initiation*, p. 71.

1072 N. CLARK, 'The Theology of Baptism', in A. GILMORE (ed.), *Christian Baptism. A Fresh Attempt to Understand the Rite in Terms of Scripture, History, and Theology*, London, Lutterworth Press, 1960, p. 316.

1073 M. DUMAIS, 'The Church of the Acts of the Apostles. A Model for Inculturation', in M. DUMAIS, R. GOLDIE & A. SWIECICKI, *Cultural Change and Liberation in Christian Perspective*, Rome, Gregorian University Press 1987, p. 9.

a Jew, no matter what he believes. In principle, a pagan can become a Jew, but through a lengthy process of a social birth, whereas a pagan could become Christian by accepting baptism and still remains a Greek or a Roman¹⁰⁷⁴. Paul in his letter (1Cor.12,13) tells the gentile Christians that they are all baptised in one Spirit, into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bound or free, and were all made to drink of one Spirit. Thus, in Christianity a new fellowship of discipleship of people belonging to various and different cultural, national, social, and religious backgrounds was made possible. In addition, baptism was seen as the entry into both the mystical body of Christ and into the new body of Christian fellowship.

Thus, in the early church, the Palestinian Christians, even after accepting Jesus as the Messiah, continued to live in their culture and practiced their former religious customs¹⁰⁷⁵. Culturally they were Jews. Their faith in Christ did not negate either their past or their culture. Similarly, the Hellenist Christians, after their conversion to Christianity, did not become Jews first but remained in their culture and practiced their new faith in Christ within their cultural contexts¹⁰⁷⁶.

It is true that their new religion was not always appreciated. The authorities did not distinguish between culture and religion. The Romans had several public worships to their gods. The Romans believed that an emperor became a god when he died and sacrifices had to be made to him. For the Romans, there could be no true and useful religion unless its public character and the worship of the gods of the Roman people were part of its observances¹⁰⁷⁷. When Christians did not offer sacrifices to the Roman gods or to the emperor, the Christian behaviour was considered as suspect and mostly perceived as a threat to the Roman culture and way of life. The Christian response was to pay the tax to the emperor and to prove that they belonged to the society and accepted the political dominance of the emperor. At the same time, they opposed worshipping anyone other than the Christian God. This view is echoed in the first letter of Peter who urges the Christians to engage in the society and be better than the ordinary citizens, so that good conduct will be noticed. The Christians argued (in vain) that they did not

1074 MARTIN, *A House Divided*, pp. 142-144.

1075 Already at this stage itself we can find slight changes or adjustments happening to Christianity. To conceive the Son and the Spirit as distinct persons, Judaic Christianity identified them with angels. Similar idiosyncrasies have developed in the local and national churches down through the ages. See for details, B.J.F. LONERGAN, *Method in Theology*, London, Darton, Logman & Todd, 1972, p. 300.

1076 In the early centuries, in some communities initiation was by anointing only (*Acts of Judas Thomas*). Elsewhere we find baptism in water (*Didache*) only. And in some places anointing came before the water bath and in others apparently afterwards. The co-existence of these different patterns may be interpreted as simply reflecting the varied etiquette in the ancient culture, and particularly Romano-Greek bathing customs. See for details B.D. SPINKS, *Early and Medieval Rituals and Theologies of Baptism. From New Testament to the Council of Trent*, Burlington, Ashgate, 2006, p. 36. It has to be noted that at that time the Christian faith and practices overlapped in significant ways with those of pagans and Jews, and there were many variations between Christian groups. The Christians welcomed members with very different ethnic and religious backgrounds. See for details, M. LUDLOW, *The Early Church*, London/New York, I.B. Tauris, 2009, pp. 47-49.

1077 KOESTER, *History and Literature of Early Christianity*, p. 337.

need to recognize pagan ceremonies in order to pray for the empire and its ruler¹⁰⁷⁸. Tertullian claimed that the Christians tend to observe the feasts of the emperor more in their hearts than by “frolicsome partying”¹⁰⁷⁹. Thus, they stressed having right belief and also made a distinction between religion and culture and viewed religion as an autonomous reality. However, this distinction and separation of religion was an alien concept for both the Jews and Gentiles and so it did not go down well with them.

5.2.2.2. The Changed Understanding of Baptism

Throughout the history, the meaning of baptism did not remain static but underwent changes. In this short section, our intention is not to present a detailed account of the development, theology, and practice of baptism throughout its long history but to present a bird’s eye view of the development of baptism in order to show that changes have occurred in the way it was understood.

In the 4th century, the church in the West went from being a persecuted religious group to the preferred and official religion of the Roman Empire. When Christianity was made a state religion, any religious public worship other than Christianity in the empire became illegal. Once the emperor had declared his religious preference, the object of his religious veneration would generally receive cult support from the public at large¹⁰⁸⁰. Thus, Christianity gained a patron in the form of the emperor. Often, political power was used to suppress all heresies and schisms. Uniformity in doctrines and practices was insisted upon by the imperialy convoked councils of the 4th and 5th centuries also in view of the stability of the empire¹⁰⁸¹. With the new situation, an amalgamation of Roman and Hellenist cultures and Christianity occurred. The Christians, while transforming it instead of rejecting it totally, accepted the Hellenist-Roman culture. Baptism was seen primarily as a social symbol or empire symbol as well as a sign of faith. Those who belonged to the church automatically belonged to the empire and vice versa. Those who did not belong to the church were called barbarians or heathens and did not get civil rights.

At the same time, by the 4th century, we find many instances of baptism delayed until the deathbed so as not to lose its benefits by sinning again¹⁰⁸². The spiritual benefit of baptism in the forgiveness of all sins and guarantee of entrance

1078 LUDLOW, *The Early Church*, p. 101.

1079 TERTULLIAN, ‘Apology’ 24, 1, in *Tertullian Apologetical Works and Minucius Felix Octavius*, Washington D.C., The Catholic University Press, 1977, p. 75.

1080 M.R. SALZMAN, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, Harvard University Press, 2002, p. 2.

1081 K. PATHIL, ‘New Ways of being Church in Asia’, in *Third Millennium* 1, 1998, 3, p. 7. See also J.B. MORRALL, *Church and State through the Centuries*, trans. S.Z. EHLER, New York, Biblo and Tannen, 1967, pp. 2-15.

1082 H.M. RILEY, *Christian Initiation. Studies in Christian Antiquity* 17, Washington DC, Catholic University of America Press, 1974, p. 213.

into the Kingdom of heaven promoted this kind of thinking in the minds of many¹⁰⁸³. It is true that the idea of cleansing from sin was part of the meaning of the rite from the baptism of John. Moreover, Peter preaches baptism for the forgiveness of sins as seen in the book of Acts (Acts 2,37, see also Acts 3,19). However, it was not overemphasized. Augustine underpinned the sinful state of humanity, and brought in the idea of original sin and promoted baptism as the means of sacramental salvation from that state¹⁰⁸⁴. Slowly, the teaching of Augustine became increasingly influential, whereby baptism was seen as primarily the means of washing off original sin. He taught that every individual was born in the state of original sin and that baptism washed away the sins and gave the baptised a new life as a child of God¹⁰⁸⁵.

Here baptism came to be a baptism from something (original sin) more than a baptism into something (the eschatological community of God). Though not mutually exclusive, the western church would in time give more emphasis to the first of these¹⁰⁸⁶.

Many changes have happened to the way Christianity was understood and practiced. In the effort to convert the aristocracy, Christianity adopted it to itself taking into account the aristocratic status and culture. The message of Christianity was not communicated to them in a vacuum but it was made part of their culture that Christianity was "aristocratized"¹⁰⁸⁷. In the following centuries, conversion to Christianity was seen as beneficial on a sociological level. It could even contribute positively towards personality status¹⁰⁸⁸. An affiliation with the Church was important for the socially ambitious. Still later, the church was controlled by the feudal lords and monarchs to the point of appointing the church dignitaries¹⁰⁸⁹. Bishops became monarchs who began to rule territorial units with jurisdiction or power of governing. Baptism was forced on the subjects by the kings. Charlemagne threatened the death penalty to anyone actively avoiding baptism and required all children to be baptised within a year of birth¹⁰⁹⁰. By now, the ideal of fusion of state and church as the most perfect form of Christian society

1083 FERGUSON, *Baptism in the Early Church*, p. 617.

1084 Pelagius categorically denied the doctrine of original sin, arguing that Adam's sin affected Adam alone and that infants at birth are in the same state as Adam was before the Fall. He was against the idea that a divine grace is necessary to perform what God commands. Pelagius also argued that though grace may facilitate the achieving of righteousness, it is not necessary to that end. Against this position Augustine argued that mankind was born into the state of original sin which leaves the humanity in a condition of being unable to refrain from sinning. The fallen man according to Augustine has a free will but has lost his moral liberty. Hence humans are totally dependent upon grace.

1085 B.B. WARFIELD, 'The Confessions of St. Augustine', in *The American Journal of Theology* 7, 1903, 3, p. 502. St. Augustine's focus was on the theology of grace.

1086 SPINKS, *Early and Medieval Rituals and Theologies of Baptism*, p. 67.

1087 For details, SALZMAN, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, pp. 200-219.

1088 *Ibid.* p. 16.

1089 MORRALL, *Church and State through the Centuries*, p. 24.

1090 N. TANNER, *The Church in the Later Middle Ages*, London/New York, I.B. Tauris, 2008, p. 76.

was evolved. It was a vision of Christian theocracy and under Charlemagne, it came to be called the Holy Roman Empire. At this juncture, the church had lost its independence to the political authorities.

After the Gregorian reform, the church became more powerful and claimed for itself superiority over the temporal power due to its spiritual authority. This reform liberated the Papacy from the lay control and meant the emancipation of the church¹⁰⁹¹. The ideal society was imagined as one in which church and state were regarded as one. However, this ideal was a long way from the reality and relations between the pope and emperor were rarely entirely harmonious. The conflict between the pope and emperor was intensified in the investiture controversy. It was resolved by the Concordat of Worms by which a division of powers between both the pope and the emperor was agreed upon. The pope was invested with spiritual power while secular power was the realm of the emperor. In this way one can say that, on the one hand, a beginning is made with a distinction in the totality of Christendom between faith and the rest of the cultural system, so that a totalitarian wholeness is broken up; on the other hand, this beginning is fragile because it looks like a simple struggle about power. One should say that the Christian distinction between faith and culture is a very high standard to live by; regressions towards the totalitarian wholeness were still possible. In Europe, it could return if the Christian faith disappeared from the continent. This development, however, did not happen in Eastern Christianity. By the end of the Middle Ages territorial monarchs in the West had succeeded in draining away much power from both the pope and the emperor¹⁰⁹².

The 16th century Protestant Reformation initiated by Martin Luther, John Calvin, and others resulted in the division of western Christianity and the formation of new national Protestant churches and confessional states. There were lengthy fights between Protestants and Catholics. The ideal of a single Christian hegemony in the territories of the Holy Roman Empire gave way for the concept of each confessional state determining its own religion. It was achieved after decades of struggle with the Peace of Augsburg (1555), which ended the conflict with the help of the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*, which means “whose realm his religion”, and resulted in the formation of confessional states¹⁰⁹³. However, the states had to deal with the problem of different confessions within their boundaries. Various strategies like persecution, mass expulsion, and various degrees of tolerations were tried. Later, by the Peace of Westphalia (1648), the modern European state system was inaugurated and it also allowed freedom of religious practices within the same state to members of different confessions, at least for private worship, liberty of conscience, and the right of emigration. It

1091 MORRALL, *Church and State through the Centuries*, pp. 22-25.

1092 J. GASCOIGNE & H.M. CAREY, ‘Introduction. The Rise and Fall of Christendom’, in J. GASCOIGNE & H.M. CAREY(eds.), *Church and State in Old and New Worlds*, Leiden/Boston, Brill 2011, p. 4.

1093 S.E. OZMENT, *The Age of Reform 1250-1550. An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1980, p. 259.

paved the way for having more confessions in the same region at a time when few could envisage anything other than a union of church and state¹⁰⁹⁴. This enabled a certain amount of individual toleration to Catholics living in Protestant territories and vice versa. However, any amount of religious toleration meant the dilution of a religiously homogenous population¹⁰⁹⁵. Slowly, the liberal political movement became prominent. Accordingly, the states claimed neutrality in matters of religion and upheld the idea of non-religious states.

During the Reformation and the formation of confessional states, the Catholic Church continued to hold on to the idea of old Christendom. By the 17th century with Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621), the idea of the church as a perfect society became more concretized¹⁰⁹⁶. Calvin emphasized the invisibility of the Church and taught that the Church is the society of the saints whose membership is known only to God while the Church on earth was considered a *corpus mixtum* of saints and sinners. Against this background, Bellarmine stressed the visible elements of the Church and described the Church as the community of men and women brought together by the profession of the same faith and conjoined in the communion of the same sacraments, under the government of the legitimate pastors and especially the one Vicar of Christ on earth, the Roman Pontiff¹⁰⁹⁷. However, his notion reinforced the idea of Church as an institutional society¹⁰⁹⁸. The Church continued to remain a hierarchical institution, the model of a perfect society with neatly defined rules, regulations, boundaries, and pyramidal structure.

Although state and Church were separated, the idea of a Church with western culture as normative for all, continued to exist. The idea of mono-culturalism was prevalent even while allowing space for different confessions. According to Lonergan, the classical assumption was that there is just one culture and that is the European culture¹⁰⁹⁹. In the Middle Ages, the unbaptised people were considered “savages” or even “beasts”. The only way for them to be saved was by being converted to Christianity¹¹⁰⁰. Moreover, the church was perceived as the exclusive institution of salvation, the “Noah’s ark” outside of which nobody could be saved. In addition, as Kuncheria Pathil observes, the famous dictum of Origen

1094 GASCOIGNE & CAREY, ‘Introduction’, p. 7.

1095 *Ibid.* p. 8.

1096 According to the concept of a perfect society (*societas perfecta*) the church is regarded as a self-sufficient or independent institution which possesses all the essential resources to gain its goal of universal salvation of humankind. For more details See H. WITTE, “‘Ecclesia, Quid dicis de teipsa?’ Can Ecclesiology be of any Help to the Church to Deal with Advanced Modernity?’, in S. HELLEMANS & J. WISSINK (eds.), *Towards a New Catholic Church in Advanced Modernity. Transformations, Visions, Tensions*, Munster/Zurich, LIT Verlag, 2012, p. 124. Historically the term was used by Aristotle and later taken by Thomas Aquinas. This term was used for the church during the 18th and 19th century to affirm the freedom of the church from the state authorities.

1097 Quoted by DULLES in *Models of the Church*, p. 16.

1098 S.K. WOOD, ‘Continuity and Development in Roman Catholic Ecclesiology’, in *Ecclesiology* 7, 2011, 2, p. 50.

1099 LONERGAN, *Method in Theology*, p. 326.

1100 H. GRÜNDER, ‘Christian Mission and Colonial Expansion. Historical and Structural Connections’, in *Mission Studies* 12, 1995, p. 22.

and Cyprian, “Outside the church there is no salvation”, originally directed against the heretics and schismatic was now applied in general against all non-Christians¹¹⁰¹. When the invading Christian armies subjugated nations, baptism was often a symbol, not of faith, but of submission to the jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical power, albeit the teaching about faith followed baptism¹¹⁰².

During the modern missionary movement most of the missionaries believed in the inner and outer correlation between western culture and Christianity. The missionary activity included both the spreading of the Gospel and the spreading of “civilization”. This mixture of faith and civilization, evangelization, and civilizing activities affected almost everywhere¹¹⁰³. Therefore, while spreading the Christian message they indirectly spread western culture as well. According to Horst Gründer, the role of missionaries in spreading western culture was more significant, as the missionaries thought their effort as a spiritual conquest and thus they became what he calls “the most militant advocates of European culture”¹¹⁰⁴. All indigenous religions were seen as necessarily decadent of which the temples had to be destroyed and all non-Christian peoples as fundamentally depraved¹¹⁰⁵. Most of the European missionaries believed in the superiority of their culture, civilization, and, above all, their religion¹¹⁰⁶. Biblical conceptions of space and time remained the standard for them. Hence, travelling to non-European cultures was compared to travelling backwards in time to an era of primitive simplicity. In this way non-Christian cultures were regarded as the same as those that existed in pre-biblical times¹¹⁰⁷. European culture was regarded as characterized by artifice and deliberations while any other culture than European was regarded as literally decomposed or inferior. In the same way, any religion other than Christianity was considered diabolic and based on instinct and intuition¹¹⁰⁸. The missionaries considered themselves as the bearers not only of a superior religion, but

1101 PATHIL, ‘New Ways of being Church in Asia’, p. 7. The Latin Phrase *Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* is attributed to Cyprian. But Origen had a similar saying “Outside this house, that is, outside the Church no one is saved”. See C. WHITE (ed.), *The Fathers of the Church. Origen. Homilies on Joshua*, transl. B.J. BRUCE, Washington, The Catholic University of America Press, 2002. p. 42.

1102 A.W. ARGYLE, ‘Baptism in the Early Christian Centuries’, in GILMORE (ed.), *Christian Baptism*, p. 191.

1103 BALDI, ‘The Mission of the Church’, p. 287. It has to be remembered that the term ‘religion’ became established as a generic term applicable to various ‘religions’ only in the early modern age as a result of a development lasting centuries starting from Cicero. Only in David Hume (1711-1776) did it finally attained this meaning. Hegel and Schleiermacher establish the term in its modern day sense. See for more details, P. HENRICI, ‘The Concept of Religion from Cicero to Schleiermacher. Origin, History and Problems with the Term’, in K.J. BECKER & I. MORALI (eds.), *Catholic Engagement with World Religions. A Comprehensive Study*, New York, Orbis Books, 2010, pp. 1-20.

1104 GRÜNDER, ‘Christian Mission and Colonial Expansion’, p. 22.

1105 *Ibid.* p. 23.

1106 D. HEMPTON, *The Church in the Long Eighteenth Century*, London/New York, I.B. Tauris, 2011, p. 20. The local measuring units, the local calendars, and the local understanding of seasons were abolished and replaced with European standards.

1107 *Ibid.* p. 21.

1108 A. PAGDEN, *European Encounters with the New World. From Renaissance to Romanticism*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1993, p. 150.

also of a superior culture¹¹⁰⁹. Therefore, by way of baptising, the missionaries were trying to integrate the natives into the European cultural complex¹¹¹⁰. They believed that they were doing a noble thing by spreading Christian civilization to all peoples. According to Kuncheria Pathil, “The new churches in the colonies were not exactly new “local churches”, but extensions of the colonizing churches... Baptism thus became not only a symbol of a religious conversion, but also of a cultural conversion to the European or western ways and customs”¹¹¹¹. This kind of westernized Christianity found its way to India with the missionary movement. The Church in India comes across to the people as a European entity. They consider baptism as sign not of spiritual transformation but of social or cultural change. Here, one has to keep in mind that Christianity is inclined to make the distinction between religion and culture. Remember how in the pre-Constantine era the Christians tried to promote this view even though this distinction was not acceptable to the Jews and Greeks. Baptism ideally is an initiation into a religion and not into a culture. However, in the later centuries it became an initiation into not only religion but also culture or more concretely into an amalgamation of religion and culture.

Our survey of baptism has shown that in the early centuries it was regarded as a rite and a practice of enjoining people to Christ as well as integrating them to the community of the followers of Jesus. The acceptance of baptism, in the case of Jewish Christians did not result in an alienation from their culture and the Hellenistic Christians did not become Jews in order to become Christians. Our survey also showed that Christianity later became closely associated with European culture and that baptism was seen as a means of both Christianizing and Europeanizing at the same time. In India baptism became associated with initiation into a religion as well as a culture. The Indian understanding of culture and religion strengthened this amalgamation. This situation encouraged the *dalits* to accept Christianity by which they tried to leave their social community and enter into a new community, which resulted in making an identification of Christianity as their religion while keeping the other castes away.

1109 C.R. BOXER, *The Church Militant and the Iberian Expansion*, Baltimore-Londers, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978, p. 39. Even if a missionary was aware of the difference between the Gospel and culture, in so far as one preaches the Gospel as it has been developed within one's own culture, one is preaching not only the Gospel but also one's own culture. See LONERGAN, *Method in Theology*, p. 362.

1110 Peter C. Phan clearly exhibits this mentality by the example of the 17th century translation of the Vietnamese interpreters of the question in the baptismal rite: “Do you want to become a Christian?” as “Do you want to become a Portuguese?”. See P.C. PHAN, ‘An Asian Christian? Or a Christian Asian? Or an Asian-Christian? A Roman Catholic Experiment on Christian Identity’, in H.Y. KIM, F. MATSUOKA & A. MORIMOTO (eds.), *Asia and Oceanic Christianities in Conversation. Exploring Theological Identities at Home and in Diaspora*, Amsterdam/New York, Rodopi, 2011, p. 62.

1111 PATHIL, ‘New Ways of being Church in Asia’, p. 9. One of the priorities of the missionaries at that time was planting of churches in the non-Christian world.

Today, the church does not hold to the understanding of religion and culture as one entity. However, the idea of the church as an independent “perfect society” with western culture as its only culture has not breathed its last breath¹¹¹². According to Hillman, even when the importance of other cultures is admitted in principle, the western mono-culturalism is still regarded as normative for Christians everywhere¹¹¹³. As Aylward Shorter says, the theoretical abandonment of this notion of culture from the Roman Catholic Church is too recent for it to cease operating immediately as a form of ecclesiastical subculture¹¹¹⁴. Additionally this view is affirmed by the Indian understanding of baptism, viewed and (practiced) as westernisation and as a threat to identity and integrity.

We have also seen the predicament of the *Khrist Bhaktas* who are eager to enter into the Eucharistic communion, which is impeded by their not being baptised as members of the church. We have figured out why the devotees are not keen on accepting baptism and why the leaders of the movement are not advocating baptism for them. At the same time, we have the Hindu understanding of religion and social community, which offers possibilities of remaining within the community and culture without legally changing the community, while accepting Jesus as the only Lord and saviour. Similarly, Christianity stresses the spiritual level while allowing sufficient freedom on the social level. Therefore, is it possible for a *Khrist Bhakta* to enter into communion with Christ and his community, while remaining in a Hindu culture? Or, are there other possibilities than baptism for their entrance to the church?

5.2.3. *Ways of Becoming Members of the Church*

1112 R.E. HEDLUND & P.J. BHAKIARAJ, ‘Conclusion. Recasting Mission and Missiology’, in HEDLUND & BHAKIARAJ (eds.), *Missiology for the 21st Century*, p. 652.

1113 E. HILLMAN, ‘Missionary Approaches to African Cultures Today’, in *African Ecclesial Review* 26, 1980, 2, p. 39.

1114 A. SHORTER, ‘African Traditional Religion and Inculturation’, in G.J. WANJOHI & G.W. WANJOHI (eds.), *Social and Religious Concerns of East Africa. A Wajibu Anthology*, Washington, Paulines Publications, 2005, p. 30. Shorter notes that the official Catholicism has clung to the moribund Latin culture of Western Christendom. He adds that the structures of universal communion in the Catholic Church remain heavily mono-cultural. In liturgy, the principle of the substantial unity of the Roman rite is strictly maintained. The 1983 Code of Canon Law is still the heir of ancient Roman patriarchal law, and still promotes a cultural parallelism in fields such as those relating to marriage. Collegiality is still heavily weighted in favour of the papal *magisterium*, often exercised in accordance with a culturally extraneous agenda, rather than in partnership with the local episcopate.

The ordinary means of becoming a member of the Catholic Church is to receive the Christian sacrament of baptism followed by confirmation and Eucharist. We have already dealt with this ordinary means of entering the church.

There are also two other extraordinary means of belonging to the church. The baptism of desire is one of these means; baptism by blood is the other. The Church teaches that those who are not baptised by water can also receive the fruits of baptism by the baptism of desire. There are two kinds of desires in this type of baptism. One is the explicit desire to receive the sacrament of baptism, and the other is the implicit desire for baptism. When a person who loves God knows about baptism and wants to be baptised, we call it an *explicit* baptism of desire. The explicit desire is seen in the case of catechumens who explicitly expressed their desire to be baptised by entering the catechumenate. Such persons are considered as belonging to the church and even if they die before their actual baptism, they receive the benefits of baptism. Thomas Aquinas states that those who desire baptism but cannot receive it because of something beyond their control may be given its effects by their desire alone¹¹¹⁵.

The implicit desire for baptism is in the case of those persons who are ignorant about baptism but seek God and have the desire to do all that God wants. In other words, the desire for baptism is contained implicitly in the desire to do God's will. If the person had known about baptism and knew that God wanted him to receive it, that person would have received baptism. However, his/her acts and the desire to do God's will reveal the disposition for the infusion of sanctifying grace. Such persons are also considered by the church to be linked or related to it. "Those who through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do His will as they know it through the dictate of their conscience those too may achieve eternal salvation"¹¹¹⁶. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells that every man who is ignorant of the Gospel of Christ and of his Church, but seeks the truth and does the will of God in accordance with his understanding of it, can be saved. It further says that we may suppose that such persons would have desired baptism explicitly if they had known its necessity¹¹¹⁷. Therefore, even without actually receiving baptism one can receive the benefits of baptism. This means that although it is the reality of the sacrament of baptism that saves, one can achieve the benefits of baptism from the desire of the sacrament when the rite cannot be received¹¹¹⁸.

The second extraordinary means of belonging to the church is by the baptism of blood. This pertains to the martyrdom of a non-baptised person who gives up his/her life for the Christian faith before he/she could receive baptism. "Their

1115 N. HEALY, *Thomas Aquinas. Theologian of the Christian Life*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2003, p. 149.

1116 *Lumen gentium*, 16.

1117 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1260.

1118 WALSH, *The Sacraments of Initiation*, p. 155.

death, indeed expresses their faith in a better and more decisive way than the ritual of baptism; they actually die with Christ, with a view to sharing in his resurrection; they become members of the heavenly church even though they have never been full members of the earthly church”¹¹¹⁹. The words of Jesus comparing his approaching death to a baptism (Luke 12, 50 and Mark 10, 38) provided the basis for applying baptismal concepts to martyrdom. Origen developed a theology of martyrdom and compared it with baptism¹¹²⁰. In this case, the effects of martyrdom include some of the effects of baptism: the complete remission of sins and the privilege of immediate entrance into heaven. The kind of faith that is displayed at martyrdom is the same faith that is declared in the actual reception of baptism.

The teaching of the church on these two extraordinary means of belonging to the church shows that God can and does give grace not only through the sacrament but also through other means although in extraordinary circumstances. Historically, the teaching on the baptism of blood and baptism of desire, which explains that people can be saved without the rite of baptism, comes in the context of catechumens who died before they could actually be baptised. Some leaders of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement consider the devotees as catechumens. Hence, let us see the differences and similarities between catechumens and the *Khrist Bhaktas* and the implications of catechumens for the *Khrist Bhaktas*.

5.2.4. *Catechumens and Khrist Bhaktas*

Khrist Bhaktas and catechumens show several similarities. However, we cannot equate them. They have their uniquenesses. They have the following similarities. Both of them have not become full members of the church. Both have responded to the invitation of the Gospel and expressed their faith in Christ through various ways. They learn more about the Christian mysteries. They desire to be united with Christ and live in a world which is in-between. They are not full members of the church but practice the Christian faith and attend most of its religious rituals.

There are also some differences. The catechumens are on their way towards full membership in the church by receiving baptism. The leaders who teach them intend to baptise them in the near future. *Khrist Bhaktas*, on the other hand, do not have the explicit intention of becoming members of the church by receiving baptism. They are eager to experience Christ and are willing to follow the Gospel. Most leaders who guide them do not have an explicit intention of making them members of the church by baptism.

¹¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 98.

¹¹²⁰ P. BRIGHT, ‘Origenian Understanding of Martyrdom and its Biblical Framework’, in C. KANNENGISSER & W.L. PETERSEN (eds.), *Origen of Alexandria. His World and His Legacy*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1988, pp. 180-99.

The catechumens are mostly individuals who want to become members of the church. The main aim of their accepting the catechumenate is their intention to be baptised in the church. Nowadays most of them come from a social background that tolerates conversion. They have abandoned their former religion and its practices, if they had one at all, and are now ready to be counted among Christians. They are willing to be enrolled in the church and to follow its rules. On the other hand, the *Khrist Bhaktas* come from a social and cultural background that disapproves conversion. The society they belong to has strong social control over the individuals and their conversion from one religion to another is not tolerated.

The catechumens possess definite although limited rights in the church. They are considered as members of the ecclesiastical community both local and universal. They have the right to attend the liturgy of the Word and to get a Christian burial in case of death. They also could get access to sacramental marriage prior to their actual baptism¹¹²¹. These rights stem from their faith in Christ and their intention to be joined to the church. Thus, it is considered that “the convert’s intent to be joined to the church in baptism has already begun to take ecclesial form in his or her very engagement in the catechumenate”¹¹²². *Khrist Bhaktas* do not have any right in the church or movement. The Church does not recognize them as part of the ecclesial community.

The catechumenate is a fixed time and it has a fixed form of conducting it. This procedure is given in detail in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*¹¹²³. The document has envisaged three stages, which any candidate must undergo. This is envisaged as a journey of the soul towards Christ. The first stage, called the pre-catechumenate or period of evangelization, is the time in which the inquirer’s own questions form the basis of formation along with celebrations of the Word that introduce the inquirers to the story of Jesus and the community of his followers¹¹²⁴. This period is of no fixed duration. It depends on the needs of those participating in it. It is the period of initial conversion and desire to become a Christian disciple because of which a person is accepted as catechumen. This stage ends with the formal acceptance of the inquirers into the church as catechumens.

1121 KAVANAGH, *The Shape of Baptism*, p. 112. However, there are discussions about the sacramentality of their marriage, although their marriage is considered as legally valid. If the catechumens were married in the church or their marriage was recognized by the church, then their marriage becomes sacramental when they receive baptism. In those cases where marriages happened outside the Catholic Church, their marriage has to be convalidated.

1122 *Ibid.* p. 111.

1123 Here we are dealing with the way it is practiced in the Catholic Church. The renewal of rite of the sacrament of baptism was undertaken after the Second Vatican Council. In 1972, the commission produced the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, hereafter shortened as *RCIA*. The following sections on the three stages of catechumenate are taken from this document.

1124 *RCIA*, 38.

The second stage is the intense preparation for the sacraments of initiation. The longest period of catechesis now takes place. The catechesis leads the catechumens not only to an appropriate acquaintance with doctrines and precepts but also to a profound sense of the mystery of salvation in which they desire to participate¹¹²⁵. The catechumen participates in the life of the believing community, particularly the celebrations of the Liturgy of the Word on Sundays and other occasions, by learning as much core doctrine as is deemed necessary, and by gradual involvement in the community's outreach. When the catechumens have experienced a conversion of heart and both they and the representatives of the community have discerned it, they are ready to proceed to the next ritual stage called the Rite of Election or Enrolment of Names. This is a period of purification and enlightenment, which normally takes place during Lent marked by three community celebrations called scrutinies, which ask God for healing and forgiveness for the elect (the new title for the catechumens). These scrutinies coincide with the 3rd, 4th and 5th Sundays of Lent.

The last stage is the reception of the sacrament of initiation, when the elect is fully incorporated into Christ and the Church by baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist, normally at the Easter Vigil. This is followed by what is called a fourth stage or a period of reflection by the newly initiated with their faith community during the season of Easter. They reflect on the significance of the Easter sacraments, especially by their weekly participation in the Eucharist, meditating on God's Word, and participating in the life and mission of the parish.

The *Khrist Bhaktas* do not undergo such stages. No enrolment of their names is done nor is any register maintained. The catechism classes are conducted year after year in the form of monthly retreats and weekly *satsaṅgs*. There is great fluidity in these processes and there are no completion times. Some devotees continue to attend these retreats regularly for several months and years. Some attend them when they are free and when they feel like attending. Also in the case of catechumens, the intention is to learn about Christ. In their case, however, this is also a condition for being baptised. Remember our earlier discussion about such sessions where the devotees are taught about the Christian value of forgiveness, love, and charity (3.7.3 & 4.1.5). Even in the absence of an intended reception of baptism, devotees participate in the catechism and live their faith in Christ. Their experience and participation abound or preponderate over the idea of membership, which has legal and juridical associations and tones.

5.2.4.1. Catechumens as Members of the Church

¹¹²⁵ RCIA, 75.

The catechumenate is a temporary and an intermediary stage where one is on the way, but not yet inside the church. How are the catechumens seen in the church? How does the church look at them and treat them?

The catechumens are envisaged as already having faith. In addition, in the journey through the catechumenate he or she comes to an ever-deepening faith in Jesus¹¹²⁶. They are counted among those who have already accepted Jesus Christ and the church. They are envisaged as Christians and as members of the ecclesial community both local and universal. The catechumens are seen as already sharing the same faith of other members. The Second Vatican Council proclaims their status as members of the church: "Catechumens who, moved by the Holy Spirit, seek with explicit intention to be incorporated into the Church are by that very intention joined with her. With love and solicitude Mother Church already embraces them as her own"¹¹²⁷. The Church also advises its members about the importance of the catechumens and the need for corporate participation in their catechism and training. Therefore, the church invites them to consider the catechumens as members and as joined to the church¹¹²⁸. The decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, *Ad gentes*, advises the sponsors that "right from the outset, the catechumens will feel that they belong to the people of God... For, since they are joined to the Church, they are already of the household of Christ"¹¹²⁹. The same view is repeated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* when it declares that the catechumens "are already joined to the Church, they are already of the household of Christ, and are quite frequently already living a life of faith, hope, and charity"¹¹³⁰.

When we examine the catechumens, what we find is a group of unbaptised persons whom the church recognises as "her own". As Christopher Butler says, externally they have not yet passed through the "door" of baptism; but in reality, they are already, in some sense, "inside" the ark of salvation¹¹³¹. He argues that here is a case where the church transcends its own visible limits and accepts that the benefits of baptism are already operative in the catechumens who have not yet received baptism¹¹³². For him, the catechumens are a privileged case because they already have an explicit desire for baptism and so for incorporation in the church. He shows that they are also a decisive case, since they show that lack of material or external incorporation into the church does not prove that one is not within the church¹¹³³.

1126 OSBORNE, *The Christian Sacraments of Initiation*, p. 99.

1127 *Lumen gentium*, 14.

1128 KAVANAGH, *The Shape of Baptism*, p. 111.

1129 *Ad gentes*, 2.

1130 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1249.

1131 C. BUTLER, *The Theology of Vatican II*, London, Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd., 1967, p. 124.

1132 *Ibid.* p. 125.

1133 *Ibid.* p. 125.

It is interesting to note that *Lumen gentium* makes a difference between the catechumens and other non-baptised people such as the Jews and Muslims and members of other religions, etc. The main difference the constitution speaks of is their non-acceptance of the Gospel. Concerning this group of Jews and Muslims, the constitution says that they are those who have not yet received the Gospel but still they are related in various ways to the people of God¹¹³⁴. The catechumens are those who have accepted and responded to the Gospel.

The *Khrist Bhaktas* cannot be placed among the group of those who have not yet accepted the Gospel. Just like the catechumens, the *Khrist Bhaktas* have accepted the Gospel¹¹³⁵. Unlike those who have not accepted the Gospel, the *Khrist Bhaktas* have a great desire to enter into communion with Christ. Their religious practices show their deep faith in Christ.

Catechumens play a role in the church as witness to the conversion to Jesus Christ. Even if the *Khrist Bhaktas* are not catechumens, they have also assumed a definite role in the church as witness to conversion to Jesus Christ. Considering their affinity with the situation of catechumens, based on their acceptance of the Gospel, their desire to be united with Christ and their life of discipleship of Christ, can we not consider the *Khrist Bhaktas* as members of the church? Thomas Aquinas states that those who desire baptism but cannot receive it because of something beyond their control may be given its effects by their desire alone¹¹³⁶. Seeing the difficulty on the cultural, social, and legal levels in receiving baptism can we not bypass the need for their receiving baptism and consider this group of devotees as members of the church? One has to bear in mind that this need concerns the means for salvation and functions in the order of gaining certainty about salvation and not about salvation as such as is clear from *Mystici Corporis Christi*, the encyclical of Pope Pius XII¹¹³⁷.

At the same time, questions can be raised about the kind of faith the devotees have. Is accepting the Gospel, the desire for communion with Christ and a life of discipleship enough for someone to be considered as a member of the Church? The *Khrist Bhaktas* have been presented with a particular form of Christianity, which has rather a strong stress on charismatic elements. Therefore, it is possible that both the positive and the negative traces of charismatic elements are present in it. Many charismatic groups fail to distinguish between the gift, the person who receives the gift, and the giver of that gift. Sometimes the person who receives the gift can misuse the gift. Some of the charismatic groups look for “supernatural” and “other worldly solutions” to all the problems, sickness, and evils

1134 *Lumen gentium*, 16.

1135 The form of Christianity presented to the *Khrist Bhaktas* is more the Catholic charismatic type.

1136 HEALY, *Thomas Aquinas*, p. 149.

1137 PIUS XII, *Mystici Corporis Christi* (1943), 103. The Pope mentions that those who are not members of the church are living in a state in which they cannot be sure of their salvation. He says that although they have a certain relationship with Christ, they still remain deprived of those many heavenly gifts and help which can only be enjoyed in the Catholic Church.

in the world. Quite intermittently, they are opposed to the use of human reason. Some of them consider that to rationalize is to make rational lies, which is regarded as acting or thinking contrary to faith. Although the role of the Spirit is stressed in the *Khrist Bhakta* movement, their acceptance of Christ as the only saviour can lead it to a kind of “Christo-monism” whereby the movement can lead itself to an inheritor of late 18th-century pietism. Above all, although we see the presence of Jesus Christ and Holy Spirit as communicated to them, the role of the Father that touches the idea of creation is more ambiguous. Even when the devotees attend the Eucharist, listen to and sometimes repeat the creed, the Hindu concept of creation together with its worldview might still be working on the horizon of the devotees. Questions can also be raised about their Hindu worldview with its lack of social commitment and ethical or moral benchmark, which may not go hand-in-hand with the Christian commitment to human dignity and society. It is also possible that the charismatic form of Christianity presented to them also underestimates such commitments. Additionally, Indian society is functioning in such a way that it does not allow individualization and so lacks the same presuppositions as western contexts where, because of individualization, an individual conversion is standard.

5.2.5. *A Road Map for the Future of the Khrist Bhakta Movement*

We have now seen the predicament of the *Khrist Bhaktas*. Our earlier sections had given the concerns of some of the leaders about the future of the *Khrist Bhaktas*. Some felt that they were neither Hindus nor Christians and that their need to belong to a community is to be met. What should be the right attitude concerning the future course of the *Khrist Bhaktas*? The challenge we are facing is not merely changing a few policies and practices, but demands a fundamental rethink of what it means to be Church in India. Some of the future possibilities in a sociological and theological sense can be summarised in the following sections.

5.2.5.1. *A Substitute Rite or Ceremony for Baptism*

One of the suggestions for the future of the *Khrist Bhaktas* is to find a substitute rite or ceremony, which is suitable and meaningful to the Indian culture and to Christianity, and to introduce it instead of the present ceremony of baptism. According to this view, baptism has negative connotations in India. It is rejected because of its social implications. Therefore, it is advocated that an appropriate ceremony or rite, which suits the context of India, should be introduced. Historically, elements in baptism were taken from the secular customs or practices of other religions of the time, while giving a Christian interpretation. As Bryan D. Spinks shows, the idea of anointing for protection and healing is a spiritualized form of a commonly accepted secular understanding of the use of oil in bath-

ing¹¹³⁸. However, the anointing with oil as messianic was distinctly a Christian addition. The early history of Christian baptism makes it hard to speak of a single original and therefore normative form of baptism¹¹³⁹. Taking a cue from this, a new rite or ceremony that is culturally accepted like *dīkṣā* means an initiation by a guru could be introduced for the *Khrīst Bhaktas*. The ceremony of *dīkṣā* commonly practiced in Hinduism is given to individuals who want to take up a spiritual discipline as a serious life-choice. Anyone who wants to be initiated as a monk has to go through a strict discipline and regular spiritual practices. He/she has to develop humility and concentration under the guidance of a guru for a considerable time. Thereafter, the guru initiates him to religious life through *dīkṣā*. The idea of introducing a new rite is echoed in the suggestion already made by *svāmī* Vineeth who wanted to have *dīkṣā* for the devotees (3.11.1). He was not speaking of replacing the baptism rite as such but he was speaking of an initiation ceremony for someone to be approved as a *Khrīst Bhakta*. He wants to have something like washing the feet of the *Khrīst Bhaktas*. According to Vineeth, a ceremony like *dīkṣā* will not separate the devotees from their Hindu brethren but will make them what he calls “Hindu Christians”. He wants to have such ceremony to differentiate between the “shoppers” and those who are seriously committed to the movement. He points out that unless an initiation ceremony is introduced, devotees tend to leave the movement too easily and also could be having divided loyalties, i.e., Christ could be seen as one of the gods. Additionally, this will be an incentive for the priests to consider them as their own people and to give them personal attention, the lack of which he thinks is hurting the movement.

It is true that a new ceremony or rite is an option. However, such a ceremony in the Christians circle lacks clarity and legitimacy at the moment. The new rite needs to be understood the way it intends to be understood. It does not fully express symbolically what is signified in the present baptismal rite. It testifies to a spiritual commitment to a guru or a tradition or a spiritual path. A new rite cannot simply obliterate the ways of thinking, feeling, and valuing that were part of the person before he or she accepted the rite. Moreover, even if we replace the rite of baptism with another ritual like *dīkṣā* there is no guarantee that this new rite will be viewed in the same way as baptism. The Hindu fundamentalists could interpret it as another missionary tactic to convert Hindus. Remember our earlier section where a similar accusation was made towards the Christian effort of the *āśram* movement. Therefore, merely a change of ritual does not safeguard the change of meaning attached to the former ritual.

5.2.5.2. Granting an Indult

1138 SPINKS, *Early and Medieval Rituals and Theologies of Baptism*, p. 37.

1139 G. KRETSCHMAR, ‘Recent Research on Christian Initiation’, in M.E. JOHNSON (ed.), *Living Water, Sealing Spirit. Reading on Christian Initiation*, Minnesota, The Liturgical Press, 1995, p. 32.

On the legal side, there are two legal systems, which have to be taken into consideration. In India, there is the Indian legal system that is applied to Christians. In addition, there is the canon law, which is applied to Catholics. The Christians in India are ruled by a different Personal Law than their Hindu brethren. The Supreme Court in India has directed that a person having performed an act of formal conversion could not be considered to remain under the Hindu Personal Law¹¹⁴⁰. Any Hindu who accepts the Christian faith and is baptised legally ceases to be a member of his social group and family. He loses his right to inheritance, loses his right to receive any privileges meant for his caste. However, the various Personal Laws in India are human laws meant for the welfare of the different religious communities in India. If the law does not allow them to fulfil their religious needs, so long as it does not result in social conflict, the law should be amended. We have seen that neither the Indian Succession Act of 1865, nor the Act of 1925 was to apply to all Christians in the whole of India. They contain provisions, which empower the State governments to exempt any race, sect or tribe from the operation of the Act, by way of a notification. It is true that not many States are sympathetic to Christians, for example, the State of Madhya Pradesh enacted the *Madhya Pradesh Dharma Svātāntrya Adiniyam* (Freedom of Religion Act) in 1968, stating that it is a crime to “convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise, any person from one religious faith to another by the use of force or by allurement or by any fraudulent means nor shall any person abet any such conversion”¹¹⁴¹. The missionaries in such places are often falsely accused of converting or trying to convert people. Interestingly, the Church also teaches that nobody should be compelled to convert¹¹⁴². However, the provision for granting exceptions is a legal recourse the Christians can attempt. There are some examples of tribes who were converted to Christianity while preserving their tribal identity. They continue to remain in their tribal culture without changing their tribal names and surnames and remain within the Hindu Personal Law. We have also seen that the Thomas Christians in Kerala were mostly from the high castes and continued to keep their social status, customs, and culture even after becoming Christians. They and some other Christians in India are governed by different rules and acts. The converts do not intend to change their communities, but the change is imposed on them. The convert’s intention is only a change of faith, a conversion of heart to Christ¹¹⁴³. The Christian community should insist that the same Personal Law as that of the Hindus rule them. The Church in India should request the State governments to issue notifications for exempting them from the above-mentioned Acts, although the present Indian situation

1140 STAFFNER, ‘Conversion to Christianity Seen from the Hindu Point of View’, p. 236.

1141 Quoted in R. PAL, ‘Religious Minorities and the Law’, in G.J. LARSON (ed.), *Religion and Personal Law in Secular India. A Call to Judgement*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2001, p. 26.

1142 Hence there is contradiction between the insiders’ perspective and the outsiders’ perspective. The works of charity initiated by the missionaries are often interpreted as allurement for conversion.

1143 Questions can be raised about the intention of those who want to leave the Hindu fold by baptism.

(where more states try to enact anti-conversion laws) does not give a rosy picture in favour of such efforts¹¹⁴⁴. The Church has the duty to preserve people in their culture and at the same time the obligation to propagate its faith by inviting people into its communion. However, a note of caution is essential since even when they choose to remain under the Hindu Succession Act, thereby remaining within their caste, it is not a guarantee that the Hindu community also will treat them in the same way.

The Catholic Church has its own law by which it is internally organized and ruled: the canon law. Within this law, indult is a faculty given by the Holy See allowing a specific deviation from the Church's law. In other words, the canonists define it as a concession granted by the competent authority that permits something contrary to or apart from the law¹¹⁴⁵. As opposed to dispensation, an indult applies to a particular type of situation, not to a single case¹¹⁴⁶. General needs, special or peculiar local conditions, etc., are sufficient reasons for making such concessions¹¹⁴⁷. Considering the local condition of the Church in India, the involved church authorities could give an indult to the *Khrist Bhaktas* to become members of the church while not being baptised. This view is close to the view of Fr. Ranjit, one of the staff members at the Matridham *āśram* (3.11.1). He thinks that they belong to Christ who has baptised them with the Spirit and that it is not a must for them to be baptised with water¹¹⁴⁸. The church has to find ways to accept them as members of the church without damaging their cultural life. For him, *Khrist Bhaktas* are a new model of living a committed life to Christ. The opinion of Fr. Ranjit probably is not in all respects theologically sound, still, the intention behind the opinion to find ways and means for accepting the *Khrist Bhaktas* as members of the church while preserving their culture is worth considering. In this respect, an indult could be a way of accepting them as members of the church. Under normal circumstances, baptism is the way to enter the Catholic Church. Giving an indult is the recognition that the situation of the *Bhaktas* is a special one and needs special consideration. It also presupposes the existence of a law, which has to be relaxed. The relaxation is in view of the salvation and sanctification of the devotees. It is also in view of enabling the devotees to live their faith from within their culture. As *Evangelii Nuntiandi* says, "The kingdom which the Gospel proclaims is lived by men who are profoundly linked to a cul-

1144 For more details about the legal possibilities, SALDANHA, *Conversion and Indian Civil Law*, pp. 139-141.

1145 P. SMITH, 'What are Indults and Dispensations?', in *Health Progress* 87, 2006, 5, p. 62.

1146 W.A. CLARK, 'Indult', in O.O. ESPIN & J.B. NICKOLOF (eds.), *An Introductory Dictionary of Theology and Religious Studies*, Collegeville, Minnesota, The Liturgical Press, 2007, p. 627.

1147 In 1997, an indult had been granted to the diocesan bishops of the United States, permitting them to conduct funeral liturgies, including Eucharist where appropriate, to be celebrated in the presence of cremated remains, instead of the natural body. M.B. CARON, 'The Cremation Conundrum', in *The Jurist* 58, 1998, 1, p. 226.

1148 In the book of Acts (10,47-48) we have a similar incident where the Spirit is showered on Cornelius, a gentile, and his companions and then Peter asks, "Can anyone object to their being baptised, now that they have received the Holy Spirit just as we did?". And then they were baptised. The difference with our case of the *Khrist Bhaktas* is that the Spirit is poured out before Baptism and Baptism is not given.

ture, and the building up of the kingdom cannot avoid borrowing the elements of human culture or cultures”¹¹⁴⁹. The church and its shepherds have the duty to work for the salvation and sanctification of the souls and perform actions that will bring people to Christ. If baptism in this context is impeding the full life of the devotees in their culture, and if giving an exception to that rule enhances their possibility of living the Gospel, eases their lives in the culture, and improves their commitment to Christ, then for pastoral reasons, an indult should be given.

However, an indult is given not beforehand but normally applied retrospectively. Moreover, an indult is given usually for a definite period of time which shows that it is granted as an exception. Careful discussion with religious scholars and consultation with experts should precede it, as it will have larger consequences. It is needed here not just for a few years and for some individuals but for a longer duration on a larger scale. Giving an indult is showing a compassionate attitude towards the devotees. Nevertheless, will it affirm implicitly a Western Christian normative attitude in practice? Together with having a compassionate attitude to their predicament, the situation calls for dealing with the situation theologically or at least invites theological justification for giving an indult.

5.2.5.3. Other Suggestions

There are some other suggestions about the future of the movement. These suggestions reflect opposing views or rather they can be placed at either end of the pendulum. On the one end, there are some leaders, especially the young priests of the diocese (although not often directly working among or for the devotees), who suggest that the *Khrist Bhaktas* be baptised in the church. They think that by baptising, the devotees will have an identity as Christians. They also suggest that baptising them after proper catechumenate will be the best solution for their future as well as for the future of the diocese. They say that to be a Christian, a devotee has to accept baptism and face the consequences, which according to them, is the way the Church always has grown all over the world. It is true that this gives clarity in vision and a pinpointed direction to those who are engaged in the mission work. However, this is too simplistic to be a solution. It does not solve the problem the Church in India is facing today. It will continue to perpetuate nothing but the existing model (which takes the baptised away from their culture and which is seen by Hindus as breaking their community), and does not contribute to the discussion on a relevant model for an Indian church.

Some others want to buy time and wait until a larger community is willing to be baptised. This view shows sympathy for the cultural and social values of the devotees and does not want to take the devotees out of their culture and community. They think that if the whole population of a village as such wants to join the church, then they will not be taken out of the community. Therefore, they think

¹¹⁴⁹ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 20.

that instead of baptising individuals, groups are to be baptised. For this reason they want to postpone the baptism of the *Bhaktas*. Many priests consider them as catechumens and want to baptise them only when a larger community is evangelized. A similar outlook is also reflected in the view of the present bishop who envisages three types of future for the *Khrist Bhaktas*, namely, some who become Christians in the future, while some will never become and still some might stay as quasi-members¹¹⁵⁰. Baptising people as a group is a successful strategy the church has used in several parts of the world¹¹⁵¹. However, in India, the missionaries tried this strategy but could attract only the *dalits*. Moreover, this strategy, in the end, brings people into the already existing model of the church and does not contribute much to the efforts for model of *ecclesia* suitable to the Indian situation.

Then, there are some priests who want to consider the *Khrist Bhakta* movement as a different model. Fr. James considers it as a new wine which needs a new wineskin. He wants to keep the *Khrist Bhaktas* away from the traditional Catholics, which for him represent the old wineskin. Mixing with them will not benefit both the already Christians and the (baptised) *Bhaktas*, instead it will affect both of them negatively. Fr. Rakesh who had worked with the *Khrist Bhaktas* presents a similar view. He wants a different model than the present church structure, which he believes cannot accommodate the situation of the *Khrist Bhaktas* and needs some changes. He says that the local church has to develop something new to suit the situation as it has the responsibility to develop liturgy and theology suited to the needs of the *Bhaktas* just as Rahner had envisaged for the future of the church. This future vision seems similar to what George Vass suggests:

Just as the Church was weaned from her Judaic background through Paul's mission to the Gentiles, she now faces a radically new period of her existence, the third one in Rahner's estimate. Just as the abolition of circumcision and most of Judaic ritual was an entry into an unknown future, we too face imponderables; we cannot know the direction in which the life of Christianity and of the Church will develop. The change, of course, must not affect the core of the gospel, but it will certainly affect the theology without which the message of Jesus would remain a closed book for most of humankind. Unless one believes that the inculturation of Christendom consequent upon a European frame of thought is a necessary appendage of revelation itself, we are in

1150 See our earlier section 3.11.2.

1151 According to this view, moving beyond seeking individual conversion the purpose of mission is planting the church among all peoples. To this aim, missionaries aim at converting the whole village or at least a sufficient number of people to form an indigenous church. This view of "planting the church", a term originally used by Thomas Aquinas, was popularized by Pierre Charles. See for further details, W.R. GOGG, 'Some Background Considerations for *Ad Gentes*', in *International Review of Missions* 56, 1967, pp. 281-290.

the process of facing a new kind of inculturation, the consequences of which are unforeseen¹¹⁵².

A similar line of thinking is reflected in the opinion expressed by many priests working with the *Khrist Bhaktas* (see our section 3.11). For example, Fr. Yagappan wants to consider this movement as a church with difference. For him, *Khrist Bhaktas* are members of the church not through sacraments, but through faith. For him it is the church of the future. Many leaders want to see the *Khrist Bhakta* movement as an alternative model or as a church with a difference.

This concern for a different model could explain the answers to one of our sub-questions about the reasons why the leaders, especially Fr. Anil Dev, gave exceptions and allowed only a few devotees to receive baptism. It has already been mentioned (see our earlier discussion 3.11) that he does not want the devotees to be made part of the existing Catholic community. Similarly, the gurus of the other two *āśrams* were also against mixing the devotees with the present Catholic parish community. The exceptions Anil Dev made concern those devotees who have not become part of the local parish but who stay as part of the devotees and regularly attend the *satsaṅgs* conducted in *āśram*. Their baptism has not changed their status in the community of devotees. They continue to belong to the community of *Khrist Bhaktas* and most of them serve as leaders of the community.

The organization of the church in a parish model does not give the impression of suiting the needs and context of the *Khrist Bhaktas*. The *āśram*-community model seems to be appropriate for them. Although the territorially-bound institutional parish model is common, the Church recognizes other models as well. A parish in canon law is defined not as an institution but as a definite community of the Christian faithful established on a stable basis within a particular church¹¹⁵³. Moreover, canon law speaks of other types of parishes and communities. "As a general rule a parish is to be territorial, that is it embraces all the Christian faithful within a certain territory; whenever it is judged useful, however, personal parishes are to be established based upon rite, language, the nationality of the Christian faithful within some territory or even upon some other determining factor"¹¹⁵⁴. The other types of communities that are mentioned in canon law are quasi parishes, mission churches, campus congregations, chaplaincies of various kinds, pastoral centres, shrine churches, oratories and even intentional Eucharistic communities¹¹⁵⁵. Therefore, the *āśram*-community model instead of the parish model could be one of the alternatives for the *Khrist Bhaktas*. However, by way of caution, care should be taken that those who are baptised and are part of the

1152 G. VASS, 'Future of a Theology. Homage to Karl Rahner', in *The Heythrop Journal* 45, 2004, 4, pp. 481-482.

1153 Canon 515.1.

1154 Canon 518.

1155 Canon 556, 564, 1223 & 1230. See for more details J.A. CORIDEN, *The Parish in Catholic Tradition. History, Theology and Canon Law*, New York/Magwah/New Jersey, Paulist Press, 1997, pp. 59-69.

āśram-based community may not become disconnected from the larger organizations or forms of the Catholic Church. One should also be alert about the intention of those devotees who may want to receive baptism in order to become leaders since a majority of those few who are baptised have now become *aguās* in the community.

On the other end of the pendulum is the view that compares baptism with the idea of circumcision. According to this view, baptism should be discarded for the devotees in the same manner as circumcision was discarded for the non-Jewish believers. One should ask to what extent is it helpful to take lessons from antiquity by comparing baptism with circumcision and argue for discarding baptism in the context of India? The Jews, like most of the people in antiquity, did not make a distinction between religion and culture. For the Jewish-Christians, faith in Christ was a continuation or fulfilment of their Jewish faith and so it did not result in a radical break from their parent religion. If we take it as a cue for our purpose and use it as a paradigm for the context of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement, it will have larger implications. The Jewish-Christians believed that God had made a covenant with the Jews and promised a saviour. The promised saviour to the Israelites was none other than Jesus. Therefore, there was continuity on a larger scale while the discontinuity was only concerning the expected Messiah. In addition, the margin between Jews and Christians at the beginning was not really much. They did not foresee a Christian religion as against or different from a Jewish religion. It was a movement within or as part of the Jewish worldview. They both had the same worldview in spite of their differences in matters of religion.

If one compares the situation of Jewish Christians to that of the *Khrist Bhaktas*, then on a deeper level it might call for comparing the Hindu religion now with that of the Jewish religion at that time. This comparison presupposes that just like God was active and guiding the Jewish religion, so was He active guiding the Hindu religion. It will also call for accepting the Hindu worldview notwithstanding the negative tendencies, which the Gospel has to challenge. Only then is the acceptance of Christ from within a Hindu worldview made possible. However, there are radical differences between Hinduism and Judaism. The differences run deep into the whole framework and vision regarding world, God, and human beings with all their consequences. Furthermore, one should remember that for the Jews, circumcision has both ethnic and religious significances. It is a sign of the covenant between Yahweh and the Jewish people. Circumcision meant the male participation in the Jewish people, ethnicity, and faith. It was the hallmark of their identity as a people and the biological lineage. It is considered as a commandment from God and, hence, is mandatory. However, baptism was not a substitute in that way. Christians consider baptism as a universal sign only of faith, and not of any ethnicity or culture. By baptism, the baptised does not enter into any nation or ethnicity; rather he or she can keep his or her ethnicity and culture while professing the Christian faith. Although baptism replaced circumcision in the early church, the meaning and significance was not the same.

The meaning, significance, and importance of baptism needs a lengthy discussion in the context of Eucharist. Therefore, we shall take it up later when we discuss Eucharistic communion. For the moment, we have made clear the flaws in comparing baptism and circumcision.

In the case of Jews, one cannot speak of acceptance of baptism in the same sense, as is the case with the *Bhaktas*. Jews were not confronted with a negative radiance concerning baptism. For them, accepting baptism was not a break from their community. The *Khrist Bhaktas*, do not share the Hindu religion (albeit the difficulty in distinguishing religion and culture) any more but only the cultural aspects of the Hindu religion. On a spiritual level, they have already discarded all that was symbolic of their former religion and accepted the spiritual aspects of Christianity thereby presenting a hybridity. It seems that the *Khrist Bhaktas* have found a way to accept Jesus from within their culture or have found Hindu reasons for faith in Christ. This context resembles the reasons about which Moltmann says, "There were Jewish reasons for believing in Jesus to be the Christ. There were Greek reasons for believing in Jesus to be the Logos. There were Germanic reasons for believing in Jesus as the leader of souls. In their own period, these reasons were not merely cultural; they were more religious in kind. Culture and religion cannot be separated. Consequently today we shall also have to enquire into Hindu, Buddhist and Islam reasons for faith in Jesus"¹¹⁵⁶. The *Khrist Bhaktas* live their faith in such a way that they have already taken the role of witnesses to the Gospel and have become messengers and witnesses to their Hindu brethren. They come together to celebrate their faith. They try to model their lives according to this faith and share it with their community. This echoes the role expected of an ideal Christian community according to *Evangelii nuntiandi*, "Those who sincerely accept the Good News, through the power of this acceptance and of shared faith therefore gather together in Jesus' name in order to seek together the kingdom, build it up and live it. They make up a community which is in its turn evangelizing..."¹¹⁵⁷.

Today, the Indian Church, in the context of the emergence of the hybrid Christianity in the form of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement, is faced with a unique situation, which calls for reinterpreting its own ecclesiological understanding. It is a unique situation, which has no precedence in history. One cannot advocate baptism for the *Bhaktas* due to their unique context while it cannot be discarded either, due to the divine nature of the command. The pastoral concern for the *Bhaktas* invites a theological response. It also pleads for taking seriously their desire for full participation in the Eucharistic communion. In the Catholic Church, normally the entrance to the church starts with catechumenate followed by baptism and culminates in the reception of the Eucharist. Thus, in the order of progression, what comes first is the reception of baptism and thereafter the recep-

1156 J. MOLTSMANN, *Church in the Power of the Spirit. A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*, Trans. M. KOH, Minneapolis, SCM Press, 1977, p. 162.

1157 *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 13.

tion of the Eucharist. However in the *Khrist Bhakta* movement, even in the absence of baptism, one can observe Eucharist-centred devotions and practices. One can also observe that Eucharist is celebrated, but not fully participated in, by the devotees who are not baptised. Therefore, at this juncture it is imperative that we look at the Eucharist-centred devotions. These Eucharistic practices and devotions shall shed some light on the role of Eucharist in their lives and their attitude towards it.

5.3. Eucharist in the Context of the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement

Eucharist holds a central place in the *Khrist Bhakta* movement. Anil Dev considers the 24-hour intercession and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament conducted in the *āśram* as the “power house” of the *āśram* and the movement (more details in 3.7.4, 4.1.1 & 4.15). The Eucharistic practices of the devotees give us the impression that they have internalized the importance of the Eucharist. One can observe their eagerness to receive the Eucharist, but the absence of their baptism keeps them away from Eucharistic communion. Considering the faith of the devotees and their desire for following Jesus closely, taking into account the difficulties they face in accepting baptism, and keeping in mind their Eucharistic practices, one may ask the question of whether there are any possibilities for allowing them, although not baptised, to the Eucharistic communion? If allowed, what are the possible problems, outcomes, and issues at stake?

First, we shall look at the Eucharistic practices of the *Khrist Bhaktas* and make an analysis of their faith expressions in the context of the Eucharist after which we shall present in summary the relevant parts of the teaching of the Catholic Church on Eucharistic sharing. Thereafter, we shall be discussing the views of the leaders of the movement on Eucharistic sharing where the unique situation of the *Khrist Bhaktas* will come under focus. This will be followed by briefly presenting the discussions and reflections on Eucharistic sharing from the theologians in India. After presenting their arguments in favour and against, including the non-baptised into the sharing of the Eucharist, we shall examine, evaluate, weigh, and compare them. Thereafter, we shall discuss the hypothetical situation of allowing the devotees to the Eucharistic communion. We shall explore its implications for the devotees, the Church in India, the universal Church, understanding of the Eucharist, the Hindus and Christians in general, and other implications in such a hypothetical situation. Finally, we shall conclude with some personal reflections on baptism and Eucharist in the context of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement.

5.3.1. The Eucharistic Practices in the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement

At the outset, it has to be stated that in the *Khrist Bhakta* movement, the devotees attend the Eucharist but they do not receive the Holy Communion. They do, however, practice the adoration of the Eucharist and other Eucharistic practices

such as short visits to the Blessed Sacrament. Based on what one can observe, these devotions have the following five earmarks.

First, there are some individual devotions to the Eucharist which are seen in the practice of some devotees who, while passing through the road in front of the *āśram*, make a short visit to the Blessed Sacrament on their way to and from their office or work. Among these devotees some of them regularly make these short visits. There are other individual devotees who come to the *āśram* on Sundays and even when the Sacrament is taken away from the *darśan bhavan* for adoration and the doors are locked, stay at the entrance, bow or prostrate at the entrance, and some even offer flowers or perform an *ārṭī* there. Most devotees, as they come to the *āśram*, visit the Blessed Sacrament exposed at the temple.

Second, there are some devotees, especially those living in the neighbourhood of the *āśram*, who regularly attend the liturgy of the Eucharist in the *āśram*. Similarly, those devotees who attend the three-day monthly retreat also attend the Sunday Eucharist as part of their retreat programme.

Third, there are those who bring the sick people and place them before the Blessed Sacrament exposed for adoration and both the attendants and the sick spend long hours, sometimes two to three days in adoration. Similarly, there are sick people who are brought to Sunday *satsaṅgs*, and when not cured during the *satsaṅg* are subsequently kept in the *āśram* for one or two days and spend time in adoration.

Fourth, there are some devotees who spend time in adoration and intercession in the temple on every Sunday and second Saturdays from 09.00 in the morning until 15.00 in the afternoon while the *satsaṅg* is progressing in the *satsaṅg* hall. They carry the lights and incenses and go in procession to the *satsaṅg bhavan* together with the priest who carries the Sacrament for the public adoration.

Fifth, the *Khrist Bhaktas* as a community participate in the adoration of the Eucharist as part of the *satsaṅg*. We have given a detailed description of this practice in our earlier sections (chapters 3 & 4). This community adoration is the culmination of the day's *satsaṅg* and the Benediction at the end of the adoration is the time when most miracles take place. It is also the time when the oil and the water are blessed.

A closer look at these adorations and Eucharistic practices present us with a variety of notions and expressions. The first one is the notion of *darśan* (vision or sight) of the Blessed Sacrament. Seeing is an important aspect of the devotion of the *Bhaktas*. The longing for a *darśan* is seen in their eagerness to look at the Blessed Sacrament when it is brought to the *satsaṅg bhavan* for public adoration. Every one turns towards the entrance when the sacrament is brought in and they continue to turn towards the sacrament as it is carried towards the main altar. The devotees who pass by the road enter the *āśram* for a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, which they term as entering the *āśram* for a *darśan* of the Lord. Similarly the house where the Blessed Sacrament is placed is called *darśan bhavan*, which means the house of *darśan*.

The idea of *darśan* is slightly different from the notion of adoration. What is happening in adoration is primarily the adoring or giving honour or homage to the Eucharistic presence of Christ. Here the act of worshipping is important. *Darśan* is seeing but it is not normal seeing. This term is used only for the vision of a deity or a holy person. It means to be quite cut off from all outside. Hindus mostly visit the temple to have a *darśan* of the deity. The very act of seeing is the central part of their worship. By *darśan* the devotee develops affection for God while God develops affection for that devotee¹¹⁵⁸. This *darśan* is both giving and taking. The beneficial look of the deity is considered as the crucial moment of the encounter with the deity¹¹⁵⁹. This notion of *darśan* has some similarity in the Catholic practice of the visit to the Blessed Sacrament although it cannot be equated. In the Catholic circles, not the vision, but the reception of the Eucharist is more important¹¹⁶⁰. The visit to the Blessed Sacrament and the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is seen as the continuation of the mystery celebrated at the Eucharist¹¹⁶¹. It is also true that the notion of vision is not strange to the Christian circle¹¹⁶². When the consecrated host is elevated at Eucharist, it is meant for vision and adoration although the stress is on adoration¹¹⁶³. *Darśan* is a notion inherent in the culture of the people in India while the idea of adoration is not so much prevalent in the Hindu culture. It seems that in the *Khrist Bhakta* movement the idea of adoration is added to the existing idea of *darśan*. Or the idea of *darśan* is being replaced or mixed with the idea of adoration.

Another important aspect of the Eucharistic practice in the *Khrist Bhakta* movement is the notion of “touching” the Eucharist or its premises. We have seen that the devotees prostrate or bow their head till the forehead touches the ground where the Blessed Sacrament is exposed. They are not allowed to touch

1158 This can be compared to the idea of hierophany as presented by Mircea Eliade. See M. ELIADE, *Shamanism. Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. W.R. TRASK, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1974, p. xiii & 258. The primacy of vision at the origins of all ritualization is elaborately described by the renowned psychologist and psychoanalyst Erik Erikson. See for details E. ERIKSON, *Toys and Reason. Stages in the Ritualization of Experience*, New York, W.W. Norton and Company, 1977. Nathan Mitchell considers it as an unconscious cooperation with the primitive human instinct to see face-to face, to gaze and be gazed upon, to participate in rituals of mutual recognition, seeing and naming. See for details N. MITCHELL, *Cult and Controversy. The Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass*, New York, Pueblo Publishing Company, 1982, p. 386.

1159 A. MICHAELS, *Hinduism. Past and Present*, p. 230. Seeing is considered as a form of touching. See D.L. ECK, *Darsan. Seeing the Divine Image in India*, Chambersburg, Anima Books, 1985, p. 9.

1160 The Catholic Church practices the adoration of the Eucharist, not only during the Mass but also outside of it, reserving consecrated bread and exposing it for solemn veneration. See for details, PAUL VI, *Mysterium Fidei*, 56 & 57.

1161 In the Catholic Church the idea of *darśan* is not completely absent. There is the story attributed to St. John Mary Vianney, who noticed a peasant coming to the church daily and spending hours before the Blessed Sacrament. Once, the Saint asked this man about what he did during the time before Jesus in the Eucharist. The man replied, “Nothing, I look at him and he looks at me”. This story is often told as model for adoration or for a visit to the Blessed Sacrament or ‘*darśan*’.

1162 There was a similar practice in the Middle Ages in the Church when the showing of the Host after consecration, and the actual sight of it attracted immense attention. The people were eager to have a view of the consecrated host. Apparently, the ringing of a warning bell was introduced so that people could come into the church and see the sacrament at the time of Elevation of the Host.

1163 B. STEINBERG, ‘The Theology of the Elevation in the Eucharist’, in *Theology* 113, 2010, 873, p. 186.

the monstrance but they try to touch the priest or his garment while he brings it in. After the benediction, even when the sacrament is removed, they touch the place near the altar where the Blessed Sacrament was placed. They also touch and bow at the temple gate even when the Blessed Sacrament is taken away for adoration. A similar idea is also seen when the sick are brought and placed in the *darśan bhavan*, where they will have proximity to the Blessed Sacrament.

The idea of touching is important for the Indians. They touch the feet of the staff of *āśram* to receive or to “take” their blessings. In the temples the Hindus are not allowed to have physical contact with the consecrated chief images preserved in the sanctuary. However, they may reach for other representations, like images in recesses on the exterior walls, etc., where they touch the entrance or the floor or the image. They might gain more contact from touching the ground with one’s forehead or prostrating full length¹¹⁶⁴. For Hindus, just as the contact with polluting objects results in the pollution of the person, the touch or contact with the holy objects bring them blessings. The *Khrist Bhaktas* thus, by various means, try to come physically closer to the Blessed Sacrament and touching is part of their effort to come into closer contact with the Blessed Sacrament.

Similarly, the Blessed Sacrament is seen also as the source of all blessings. The devotees bring water and oil to the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament so that it can be blessed at the time of Benediction. The Hindus visit the temple with food to be offered to the deity. The offering is accepted by the priest and a part of it is returned to the devotee as *prasād*¹¹⁶⁵. The *prasād* is consumed and shared by the devotees. It is distributed to anyone who wishes to share from it. The *Khrist Bhaktas* follow an almost similar custom by bringing the things to be blessed and then it is taken back home. However, the item is not given to the priest in the *āśram*, nor is a portion taken by the priest to offer it to the deity. Most miracles and cures take place at the time of Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. People bow down, kneel, or prostrate completely. They are also asked to keep their palm on the part of the body where they have pain and to receive the blessing during the Benediction. They thus consider the Blessed Sacrament as the most important source of healing, attention, and centre of their adoration and spiritual practices.

Some *Bhaktas* living in the neighbourhood villages of the *āśram* attend the Catholic liturgy daily. Similarly, on the last Sunday of every month around 150 devotees attend the monthly *satsaṅg* and as part of the retreat they also join the liturgy. They listen to the preaching eagerly, sing and recite the prayers in a loud voice, and show even more devotion during the liturgy. The leaders feel that it is at the liturgy, especially at the time of the distribution of the Holy Communion, the discrimination of the *Khrist Bhaktas* becomes evident. *Param prasād* is the term normally used in India for the Holy Communion. At the time of commun-

1164 B. LUCHESI, ‘Looking Different. Images of Hindu Deities in Temple and Museum Spaces’, in *Journal of Religion in Europe* 4, 2001, p. 201.

1165 The Hindus treat *prasād* as holy. If *prasād* falls down, they pick it up, touch to their forehead and keep it on a wall for sparrows or pigeons. They consider it as a matter of faith, and if someone doesn’t have it, then *prasād* has no value. For details see our earlier discussions in chapter 3.

ion, in spite of reminding that only the Catholics are allowed to come forward to receive the communion, some devotees get up and come to the queue, from where they are subsequently sent back by the leaders. After the communion, the priest normally reminds the devotees that they have received the Lord in the form of the Word while Catholics have received the Lord in Word and in the *param prasād*, the supreme gift of God in the form of bread. Similarly on second Saturdays, during *satsaṅg* after the Benediction, all the devotees and the Catholics are offered *prasād*. So, the devotees get only *prasād* while the Catholics get *prasād* on second Saturdays and *param prasād* on every Eucharist. In the Hindu temple, all the devotees receive *prasād*, even if they are not practicing the religion. In Matridham *āśram* the devotees are not given *param prasād* in spite of their faith and practice of Christianity.

5.3.2. The Teaching of the Catholic Church on Eucharistic Sharing

The Catholic Church teaches that the Eucharist is the most important sacrament. “It is the source and summit of the Christian life”¹¹⁶⁶. All the other sacraments and all the works of the church are oriented to the Eucharist. It is also seen as the culmination of God’s action of sanctifying the world in Christ as well as complete worship humans offer to Christ and through Him to the Father in the Holy Spirit¹¹⁶⁷. It is the spiritual nourishment for those who receive it. As we had seen earlier, the Eucharist completes Christian initiation. “Those who have been raised to the dignity of the royal priesthood by Baptism and configured more deeply to Christ by Confirmation participate with the whole community in the Lord’s own sacrifice by means of the Eucharist”¹¹⁶⁸. The sacramental sharing of the body and blood of Christ makes the community one body and draws it into the fate of the body of Christ¹¹⁶⁹. The Eucharist is the summing-up of the spiritual life and the destination of all the sacraments¹¹⁷⁰. By giving himself as food, Christ makes his life pass into that of the faithful in such a way that they live the divine life more profoundly¹¹⁷¹. Thus, through the reception of the Eucharist, the faithful or the community is strengthened by Christ in order that they become changed into the true body of Christ and so become themselves a sacrifice pleasing to God¹¹⁷². By the gift of his body and blood, Christ increases in the recipients the gift of his Spirit, already poured out in baptism and bestowed as a “seal” in the sacrament of the Confirmation¹¹⁷³.

1166 *Lumen gentium*, 11.

1167 *Eucharisticum mysterium*, 6.

1168 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1322.

1169 E.J. KILMARTIN, *The Eucharist in the West. History and Theology*, Minnesota, The Liturgical Press, 1998, p. 381.

1170 *Summa Theologiae*, III, q.73, art. 3, 1.

1171 J. GALOT, ‘Eucharistic Presence and the Christian Vision’, in R.A. TARTRE (ed.), *The Eucharist Today. Essays on the Theology and Worship of the Real Presence*, New York, P.J. Kenedy and Sons, 1967, p. 98.

1172 KILMARTIN, *The Eucharist in the West*, p. 381.

1173 JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 17.

The Catholic Church has specific rules and guidelines on who can receive the Eucharist. Not all Catholics are allowed to receive the Eucharist. In order to receive the Eucharist, a Catholic must not be in a state of mortal sin, but should have the required grace¹¹⁷⁴. He also must have been to confession if he had committed mortal sin, and he is required to believe in the sacramental presence of Christ in the Eucharist and observe one hour of Eucharistic fasting¹¹⁷⁵. The Eucharist is not shared with young children in the Catholic Church. The administration of the Eucharist to Catholic children requires that they reach the age of reason and that they are prepared well, that they have sufficient knowledge about the mystery of Christ present in the Eucharist, and they are able to receive the body of Christ with faith and devotion. Normally, a Catholic minister administers the Eucharist to those who are in full communion with the Church.

The Eastern Churches and the Catholic Church have much in common with regard to the matters of faith, although they are not in full communion. The Catholic Church acknowledges in those Eastern Churches the presence of true sacraments, especially Eucharist through the apostolic succession¹¹⁷⁶. Therefore, Catholic ministers are allowed to administer the sacrament of Eucharist to members of the Eastern Churches, who ask for it of their own free will and are properly disposed¹¹⁷⁷.

The Catholic Church only permits access to its Eucharistic communion to those who share its oneness in faith, worship, and ecclesial life¹¹⁷⁸. Therefore, the sharing of the Eucharist with the Christians of other churches and ecclesial communities is not permitted in general. The *Code of Canon Law* states under which conditions a baptised person who is not in full ecclesial communion might receive the sacrament¹¹⁷⁹. In these exceptional cases the spiritual nourishment of an individual can justify reception of the Eucharist even when full ecclesial communion is not present¹¹⁸⁰. These cases are treated as exceptional cases, such as the danger of death or the presence of a grave necessity in the judgment of the diocesan bishop or the Bishops' Conference. In such cases, the Catholic ministers may administer the sacrament to those Christians who are unable to have recourse to the sacrament from a minister of his or her own Church or ecclesial community, ask for the sacrament of his or her own initiative, manifest Catholic faith in this sacrament, and be properly disposed¹¹⁸¹.

1174 Corinthians 11, 27-28.

1175 *Code of Canon Law*, here after abbreviated as *CIC*, 919.1

1176 *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, 122.

1177 *Ibid.* 125. See also *CIC*, 844.3 and *Corpus Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium (CCEO)*, 671.3

1178 *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, 129.

1179 *CIC*, 844 and *CCEO*, 671.

1180 J.H. PROVOST, 'Eucharistic Sharing From the Perspective of Roman Catholic Law', in L. WEIL, M. HELLWIG (eds.), *Food for the Journey. Study on Eucharistic Sharing*, Albuquerque, National Association of Diocesan Ecumenical Officers, 1985, p. 73.

1181 *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, 130. See also *CIC*, 844.4 and *CCEO*, 671. 4; M. WJLENS, *Sharing the Eucharist. A Theological Evaluation of the Post Conciliar Legislation*, Lanham, University Press of America, 2000, p. 343. However, the Bishops are advised not to

The Eucharist presupposes an existing unity of the members who share the communion. Eucharistic communion is the expression and source of full ecclesial communion. In the Catholic teaching, full communion of faith is made clearly visible at the celebration of Eucharist¹¹⁸². The expression of or act of receiving the Eucharist is the highest expression of a living and visible unity of faith and life with the community which celebrates the Eucharist¹¹⁸³. Sharing of the Eucharist thus implies the sharing of the same faith.

Non-Christians are excluded from the reception of the Eucharist, since they do not fulfil the conditions for admission to Eucharistic sharing. First of all, they have not received baptism which is seen as the gateway to all other sacraments. Second, the Eucharist is seen as the sign of Christian unity. "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread"¹¹⁸⁴. Therefore, when a person receives Holy Communion, he or she should be expressing a deep unity of faith and love with that particular community, and with the wider communion of the Catholic Church around the world¹¹⁸⁵. So, the reception of the Eucharist implies an existing unity, which is not the reality in the case of non-Christians. They do not show the signs of sharing the same faith of the Catholic community which celebrates the Eucharist. The Eucharist simultaneously produces and demands the unity of the Church. Practically all guidelines and norms given by the Church are governed by the value that Eucharistic communion is an expression of ecclesial communion. Therefore, when there is no full ecclesial communion, there cannot be Eucharistic communion¹¹⁸⁶.

5.3.3. *Eucharistic Sharing: Reflections from the leaders of the Khrist Bhakta Movement*

The issue of including those who are committed to Christ, while belonging to different religious communities, into the Eucharistic sharing is peculiarly an Indian ecclesiological problem. As we have seen earlier (2.1.2.1), until recently only some individuals showed such commitment to Christ and at the same time remained within their religious fold. However, in the context of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement there are hundreds of devotees who are committed to Christ yet unable to be baptised and who want to enter into the Eucharistic sharing. Hence, this situation calls for a deeper discussion and pastoral understanding. In this section

form any general norms without consulting with the local competent authority of the interested non-Catholic Church or community.

1182 JOHN PAUL II, *Ut unum Sint*, 97.

1183 Catholic Bishops' Conference of England & Wales, Ireland, and Scotland, *One Bread One Body. A Teaching Document on the Eucharist in the Life of the Church, and the Establishment of General Norms on Sacramental Sharing*, London/Dublin, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England & Wales, Ireland, Scotland, 1998, p. 39.

1184 1 Corinthians 10,17.

1185 Catholic Bishops' Conference of England & Wales, Ireland, and Scotland, *One Bread One Body*, p. 41.

1186 WILLENS, *Sharing the Eucharist*, p. 357.

we shall see what the leaders of the movement envision about the Eucharistic sharing of the devotees.

In general, the leaders of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement are not happy with the exclusion of the devotees from the Eucharistic communion. It is they who preach to the devotees about the importance of the Eucharist. They conduct the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and the Benediction for the devotees. And yet it is at the time of the distribution of the Holy Communion on every Sunday that they have to announce that non-baptised persons are not allowed to come forward. The devotees are either not given the Eucharist, as is the practice on Sundays, or they are given some substitute as done on second Saturdays.

Some leaders have already expressed their pain in not being able to admit them to the Eucharistic communion in spite of their deep faith (details in 3.11). Some priests in the parishes and in the two other *āśrams* experience it as a form of discrimination and try to minimize it by distributing a substitute edible item to the devotees. The leaders in the *āśram* are aware of the teaching of the Catholic Church about sharing the Eucharist. At the same time, they are also aware of the particular situation of the *Khrist Bhaktas*.

Because of this particular situation of the *Bhaktas*, and being aware of the teaching of the Church on Eucharistic sharing, most leaders focus on the need for considering a different ecclesiological model. Vineeth had envisaged *diksha* for Hindu-Christians although not as a substitute for baptism, but to distinguish between the seriously committed and the less committed. Such initiated *Bhaktas* may be considered in some way as belonging to the Church.

Fr. James speaks of a new model of church without the necessity of administering baptism due to the particular context. In his words, the *Khrist Bhakta* movement is a “new wine” and this new wine needs a “new wineskin.” Some leaders like Fr. Ranjit and Fr. Yagappan (Shanti Dham) also speak of the devotees as already Spirit-filled and hence in need of a different approach towards them. Bishop Raphy also considers it as a movement led by the Spirit.

Anil Dev, being aware of the situation, is looking for a suitable ecclesiological model, where the devotees will not be forced to leave their cultural world and at the same time will be considered as members of the Church. Additionally, for him, those devotees who are from the higher *varṇas* who take their commitment to Christ seriously, and whom he calls mystics, are in a situation where they want the spiritual nourishment of the Eucharist but for whom breaking their family and social ties are not desirable. Therefore, he calls for a reconsideration of our present understanding and regulation of Eucharistic sharing and ecclesiology. He points out that no one understands the pain of the high castes. He is aware that with the present ecclesiological model, they cannot be admitted to the Eucharist. Considering the particular need and situation of the devotees, he wants the Church to re-think its self-understanding in such a way as to embrace the devotees as insiders, as belonging to the Church. He pledges his commitment to the

Church and does not want to have any confrontation with the authorities of the Church. He wants a new model useful and suitable for the Church and the devotees.

5.3.4. *Eucharistic Sharing: Reflections from the Context of India*

In India, there were individuals who showed faith and commitment to Christ but chose not to receive baptism, and thus remained outside the church. We had seen (chapter 2) that several great Hindu converts to Christianity had refused to disown their Indian heritage, and lived like Hindus even after becoming Christians, and passionately pleaded for a Hindu-Christian form of Church in India. All of them argued for a model of Church in India, in tune with its ethos and culture. Such people wanted to share the Eucharist and remain both as Hindus and Christians at the same time. However, we do not have much theological reflection in India about Eucharistic sharing with non-baptised people. The sparse material that we have is mostly in the context of individual cases and not in the context of a community like the *Khrist Bhaktas*. Nevertheless, there are a few references and observations from Indian theologians on this topic. We shall present here the meagre and scanty deliberations.

We shall first of all review those arguments and opinions which call for the inclusion of the non-baptised into Eucharistic communion. We shall start with presenting the relevant parts on Eucharistic sharing from two papers presented at a research seminar in 1988 on *Sharing in Worship: Communicatio in Sacris*, organized by NBCLC in Bangalore¹¹⁸⁷. This will be followed by presenting relevant parts related to our topic from the reports of the groups and the final statement of the same seminar. Subsequently, we shall be presenting other available arguments by Indian theologians for the inclusion of the non-baptised in the Eucharistic sharing. After presenting their views, we shall make a summary of their arguments and suggestions, which will be condensed into three theses. Consequently, taking each thesis, we shall examine them in detail to see the strengths and weaknesses of these theses. Eventually, we shall take up the opposing views and summarize them, which together with a summary of the teaching of the Church on Eucharistic sharing, will also be condensed into three theses. Subsequently, taking each thesis, we shall examine them in detail and weigh them to find out the strength and weaknesses of these arguments. Eventually, we will compare the arguments from two sides and conclude with some personal observations and suggestions on baptism and Eucharistic sharing in the Indian context.

The 1988 research seminar on sharing in worship included forty papers from different perspectives. Two of these papers, the report of some group discussions, and the final statement of the seminar throw some light on the reflections in

¹¹⁸⁷ The Commission of the Catholic Bishops' Conference for Christian life organized this seminar at the National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre (NBCLC) Bangalore. It was attended by 52 scholars mainly theologians from different parts of India.

India on sharing the Communion in Eucharist. John B. Chethimattam presents the Eucharistic sacrifice as the celebration of Christ's life and sacrifice, which has behind it the reality of our intercommunion with all believers to transform the world into God's Kingdom¹¹⁸⁸. He emphasises that according to the faith of the Church, in the present order of things there is only one economy of salvation for all human beings. All human beings are united in Christ in concentric circles of varying intimacy. God's power is not tied to the sacraments, which Chethimattam says is echoed in the writings of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Rahner.

We have already seen (in our section on baptism) that according to Thomas Aquinas, God sanctifies even the unbaptised inwardly on account of their desire for baptism. According to Rahner, God sees all human beings as brothers and sisters of his incarnate Son and that by the gracious coming of the Logos in the flesh, in the unity of the race, in the one history of humanity, mankind as a whole has become a consecrated humanity, the people of God¹¹⁸⁹. We can see Rahner comparing the present situation with the situation of Paul when he inaugurated the mission to the Gentiles and thereby altering the face of a short lived Judaeo-Christianity, amalgamating it with a Hellenistic-Mediterranean culture. It was an interruption of continuity and this transition really involved a caesura, a new beginning. If Paul's situation is parallel to ours then, as Rahner says, "Today we are for the first time living again in a period of caesura like that involved in the transition from Judeo-Christianity to Gentile Christianity"¹¹⁹⁰.

According to Chethimattam, St. Paul argued against the Judaisers of his time that the contact with the humanity of the Logos substituted circumcision which was practiced in Judaism. Paul argues that in Christ neither circumcision nor non-circumcision counts for anything (Gal. 5, 6; 6, 15), that it is through baptism that the believers belong to Christ and have become descendants of Abraham and heirs according to a promise (Gal. 3, 29). Chethimattam uses the same argument saying that those believing in Christ although not baptised are in actual contact with Christ through their faith. He wants the willing participation of these non-baptised devotees in the Eucharistic celebration to be taken as a sign of their intimate contact with (the humanity of) Christ¹¹⁹¹.

In another paper presented in the conference, Raymond Panikkar observes that if Christians lay claim to an unrestricted universality they cannot withhold their treasures from any aspirant¹¹⁹². He says that if the conditions for any candidate are tied to a particular culture or religion, the alleged universality is not a human-wide universality, but rather linked to the belief that one particular culture

1188 J.B. CHETHIMATTAM, 'The Universal Sacrificial Ethos and *Communicatio in Sacris*', in PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Sharing Worship. Communicatio in Sacris*, Bangalore, NBCLC, 1988, p. 187.

1189 K. RAHNER, *The Church and the Sacraments*, London, Burns & Oates, 1974, p. 13.

1190 K. RAHNER, *Theological Investigations* 15, New York, Crossroad, 1982, p. 85.

1191 CHETHIMATTAM, 'The Universal Sacrificial Ethos and *Communicatio in Sacris*', p. 187.

1192 R. PANIKKAR, 'Chosenness and Universality. Can Both Claims be Simultaneously Maintained?', in PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Sharing Worship*, p. 229.

and religion represent the acme of humanness¹¹⁹³. He further says that when the Christians are celebrating the Eucharist, they are performing the ritual not only for themselves but also vicariously for everybody. He questions whether they are ready to perform it also with everybody in so far as there is good intention, respect, and desire to share in that trustful thrust. Panikkar, being aware of the requirement of the Church which holds that only the baptised are admitted to the Eucharist, wants the Church to make a decision about doing away with baptism as a requirement for entering the Church. He therefore wants the Church to convene a Council of Jerusalem II for this purpose. He says that it is time to take a decision and say that “it appears to the Holy Spirit and us” that baptism is no longer needed. He calls for a Council of Jerusalem II in order that the council may discern the signs of the times for the humankind as a whole¹¹⁹⁴. However, it is important to remember our earlier observation about the circumcision-baptism comparison in 5.2.5.3.

The above mentioned seminar had discussions in sub-groups on the issue of sharing worship. The reports of three groups speak about the specific cases or the difficulty experienced in certain circles about the acceptance of non-baptised believers into the Eucharistic communion¹¹⁹⁵. There were both supporting and opposing views on the issue.

The report of the first group says that normally one should not deliberately promote *communicatio in sacris*; however, in situations and special cases like the pilgrim centres, where someone eagerly approaches, we cannot deny it¹¹⁹⁶. The argument the group gives is that in such situations the rituals and symbols belong to humanity and not necessarily to a particular religious group. They feel that in such situations the sharing is a basic human right and it would not be right to deny it to anyone.

The report of the second group says that the Church in India is understood in a distorted way. They are of the opinion that at its core the Church is the community of believers in Jesus Christ, committed to his image of God’s reign, nourished by the Word of God and the sacramental union with Christ in the Eucharist. They point out that the Church has adopted features which, in its actual forms, make it inaccessible to many people in India. They say that baptism seems to divorce the Indians from the culture and social structures of their society and alienates them from the treasured bonds of family and community. Therefore, the reason for this group to advocate such devotees to the Eucharist is their deep desire they show to be invited to the wellspring of their life and the wish of Jesus to give Himself to those who believe in Him and to make them share his life. Therefore, they argue that the basis for their admission to the Eucharist is their

1193 *Ibid.*

1194 *Ibid.* pp. 229-249.

1195 PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Sharing Worship*, p. 762.

1196 *Ibid.*

genuine faith in Jesus Christ, in whom God is with us to heal, to renew, to unite with Himself; so they belong to the fellowship of his believers, committed to God's reign. They further argue that these people must be nourished by the Eucharistic communion with Jesus Christ. For they also belong to God's people which, in its full structural reality is the Catholic Church, although under the given conditions they cannot be visibly identified with it¹¹⁹⁷. They agree that the Eucharist should be given only to those who fulfil the minimum conditions such as being aware of what Eucharist means, being in close interaction with the Catholic Community, being committed to the promotion of the Kingdom, and wanting to join the Eucharist on his or her own initiative.

The third group remarked that our Eucharistic worship may border on idolatry if we are not ready to welcome people of other faiths to it who are genuinely prepared and spontaneously ask for it¹¹⁹⁸. They argue that under the guidance of the Spirit, Christians in India have to work for the formation of a universal human *koinonia* in Christ's spirit. They say that those people who have the desire to receive the Eucharist, and who have no possibility of receiving baptism, and have total commitment to the cause of Christ and have an implicit faith in Jesus be admitted to the Eucharistic communion¹¹⁹⁹.

Besides these group reports, the final statement of the seminar also addresses the question of the Eucharistic hospitality to the followers of other religions. The statement says that such sharing could be the expression of a common bond that exists *de facto* within the one universal economy of salvation. The statement advocates the sharing of Eucharist to those who are committed to Christ and at the same time are not able to accept baptism. The statement numbers 45 to 47 states:

45. Eucharistic hospitality to followers of other religions could be our expression of a common bond that exists *de facto* within the universal economy of salvation.

46. There is no more 'disciplina arcana' (secret discipline) as in the early Church. Nowadays people of other faiths are often present at Eucharistic services. Why not admit those who so desire to Holy Communion which is the climax of the whole Eucharistic celebration? If sharing of Scriptures is to be promoted, those who so desire, may be welcomed to a fuller experience of the one Word in the Eucharistic Communion. Word and Eucharist cannot be separated in one act of Christian worship. Moreover, where there is profound sharing in life and common commitment, one cannot be satisfied with substitutes at the climax of the Eucharistic celebration of life.

1197 *Ibid.* pp. 762-763.

1198 *Ibid.* p.768. This group clarifies that idolatry is attributing undue importance or sacredness to religious things and persons. In this case, the Bible may become an idol if one forgets that God speaks to us not merely through the Bible. Whenever one fails to have a universal vision or wherever one tries to reduce the transcendent whole to something specific, it is a tendency towards idolatry.

1199 PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Sharing Worship*, p. 779.

47. In the light of these principles we may conclude that:

a) Eucharistic sharing is primarily meant for those who are united with each other in faith and baptism;

b) It could be extended to those who are committed to Christ, but for some serious reason, do not accept baptism fearing alienation from their community¹²⁰⁰.

Apart from the seminar papers we do not find much material from the Indian theologians on the theme of Eucharistic sharing with the non-baptised. However, in some quarters there are some people who want the Church to share the Eucharist with the non-baptised who have the required disposition. We shall present here the relevant arguments of these theologians.

Taking up the issue of sharing Eucharist with the non-baptised believers in Christ, M. M. Thomas (Mar Thoma Church) had called for the formation of an ecclesiology which can invite to the Lord's Table those who acknowledge Jesus Christ as decisive for their lives and are prepared to enter the worshipping congregation but not the communally organized body of Christians¹²⁰¹. Religious conversion to Christ, according to him, shall essentially be a change of faith, which involves participation in the local worshipping congregation of Christian believers without transference of community and cultural affiliations, but with a commitment to the ethical transformation of the whole society and culture in which they participate with others of different faiths¹²⁰². Here, Thomas wants to have a change in the way the Church is realized now. He advocates a form of fellowship which is explicitly linked to Jesus Christ but remains religiously, culturally, and socially part of the Hindu community¹²⁰³. Such fellowship for him will be capable of entering into the main religious and cultural life of India.

Taking the example of the early Church where the Jewish Christians were allowed to continue to be Christians without renouncing their Jewish identity, Puthenangady wants the followers of Christ to be allowed to remain Christians and Hindus at the same time¹²⁰⁴. Being aware of the teaching of the Catholic Church and looking for an alternative model, he proposes to start some sort of celebration by which the non-baptised can experience Christ in whom they believe. It will be a celebration in which both the baptised believers and the non-baptised believers can take part.

1200 *Ibid.* p. 800.

1201 M.M. THOMAS, *The Church's Mission and Post-Modern Humanism. A Collection of Essays and Talks 1992-1996*, Delhi, CSS & ISPCK, 1996, pp. 153-154.

1202 THOMAS, *The Church's Mission and Post-Modern Humanism*, p. 152.

1203 M.M. THOMAS, 'Baptism, the Church and Koinonia', in M.M. THOMAS (ed.), *Some Theological Dialogues*, Madras, The Christian Literature Society, 1977, p. 121.

1204 P. PUTHANANGADY 'Christian Community as a Multi-Cultural Reality', in K. KUNNUMPURAM, E. D'LIMA & J. PARAPPALLY (eds.), *The Church in India in Search of a New Identity*, p. 189. The author does not spell out details of this proposed new ritual.

Desmond D'Souza says that the exterior forms of parish life, laws, and precepts isolate the community from other members of the human family. Moreover, the excessive institutionalization of the people of God in India today according to Canon Law has become an obstacle to the crucial community dimension that is demanded to contribute towards the building of a new society. He says that the collective identity of Christians is expressed primarily in the Eucharist. Therefore, he thinks that the present Eucharist has become an empty ritual rather than a source of mission because it has lost the link with Jesus' table-fellowship of equality and welcome for all¹²⁰⁵.

In 2010, an All-India Seminar under the banner, *Church in India Tomorrow*¹²⁰⁶, was organized by the diocese of Rajkot in collaboration with the Indian Journal for Evangelization called *Third Millennium*. We do not find much material on the liturgical matters, but the stress was on more general themes like evangelization and the present challenges facing the Indian Church. However, the key-note speaker, Anto Karokaran, gave some attention to the model of ecclesiology required for the Church in India¹²⁰⁷. He called for focusing on the person of Jesus and forming a fellowship of discipleship centred on Him.

Sara Grant, one of the pioneers in interreligious dialogue in India, after her long lived-experience with the Hindu monks and friends, proposes that the Eucharist be made the first sacrament in India which initiates brothers and sisters of other faiths into a deeper following of Christ, which, if and when they wish, can be followed by baptism¹²⁰⁸. Accepting baptism has a negative connotation in India while accepting Eucharist has a positive association. Felix Wilfred also regards this suggestion as worth considering since the celebration of life and death of Jesus Christ and its meaning is much more easily perceived and lived by the Hindus in Eucharist than in baptism¹²⁰⁹.

Before we proceed further, an observation seems appropriate. The arguments and discussions about sharing worship were mainly from the seminar conducted in 1988. We do not find in India much contemporary theological discussion on sharing the Eucharist with the non-baptised. We had seen (2.2.3) that under the guidance of the Catholic Bishops' Conference, NBCLC had conducted regular all-India research seminars and training programs for the Indian Church in order to implement the directives of the Second Vatican Council and to initiate renewal

1205 D. D'SOUZA, 'The Challenges to the Church Today', in P. PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Yesu Krist Jayanti 2000. Towards a New Society*, Bangalore, National Committee Yesu Krist Jayanti 2000, 2001, p. 318.

1206 The first All-India Seminar conducted by the CBCI at Bangalore was under the banner 'Church in India Today'. This seminar (September 6 to 10, 2010) conducted 40 years after the first one echoes a follow up of the first one, although not conducted by CBCI.

1207 A. KAROKARAN, 'Evangelization, Identity of Diverse Peoples and Universality of Jesus of Nazareth', in *Third Millennium* 14, 2001, pp. 4-30.

1208 S. GRANT, 'Towards a Practical and Experiential Dialogue with People of other Faiths', in *Vidyajyoti* 49, 1985, pp. 29-35.

1209 F. WILFRED, *Sunset in the East?*, p. 177.

of the Church in India through inculturation and liturgical renewal. Following the controversy over the proposed “Indian Mass”, the liturgical renewal came to a standstill with the transfer of decision-making power to the regional Bishops’ Conferences. This has significantly reduced the research seminars, and, hence, we do not find much scholarly works among the Indian theologians about sharing the Eucharistic Table. Such seminars are opportunities for the theologians to reflect on the relevant issues facing the Church and articulate the necessary direction the Church should take. Will this decrease in theological discussions and research seminars hurt the future of the Church in India?

We have now seen the major arguments and opinions of the theologians calling for the inclusion of the non-baptised into the Eucharistic communion. Similarly, we have seen the main views of the leaders of the movement and the general opinion in India. In order to examine them, we shall bring out the main suppositions and reference points in these arguments and opinions in summary form, and place them in a logical order.

1. There exists a wrong perception of Christianity in India. Because of this perception, baptism is seen as a sign of betrayal of one’s family, nation, and culture. Moreover, the baptised person moves from falling under Hindu Personal Law to falling under Christian Personal Law and, thereby, changes his community socially and legally according to Indian civil law¹²¹⁰.
2. Christianity is seen as tied to Western culture. The Church, in the context of 2. India, by not incarnating in the Indian mind-set and worldview, is seen as a particular entity tied to Western culture. Therefore, the Church should accept Indian culture which includes Indian religious forms and an Indian worldview as the starting point so as to make the Church really universal.
3. Because of these cultural (negative attitude and non-acceptance of the Indian culture by the Church) and legal (existence of different Laws) difficulties, Hindu devotees of Christ cannot accept baptism as a sign of their commitment to Christ and, therefore, it cannot be advised to them.

These three summary points are the bases or foundations that compel the Indian theologians to look for ways for including the non-baptised believers in Christ to the Eucharistic communion. Their arguments contain several suggestions for the possible inclusion of such believers into Eucharist. We have included the suggestions from the leaders of the movement as well. Some of these suggestions have implications for the Eucharist, while others have implications for baptism and the Church or all of them. The following suggestions are inferred from their arguments we have already presented:

¹²¹⁰ The report of the seminar, the views of leaders on baptism as presented in 5.2.1.2, and the Indian understanding of Baptism as presented in 5.2.1.3.

1. Discard baptism as a condition for entering the church and for the admittance to the Eucharist in India in the same way circumcision was discarded in the first century (Chettimattam, Panikkar & Fr. James).
2. In the place of baptism, the willing participation in the Eucharist of those who are committed to Christ may be considered as the sign of their faith in Christ and they may be included in the Eucharistic sharing (Chettimattam, report of the groups & the Final Statement of the seminar).
3. Consider the Eucharist the expression of the common bond that exists *de facto* within the one universal economy of salvation (Chettimattam & Final Statement of the seminar).
4. Substitute the Eucharist with some other celebrations which will be open to both the baptised and the non-baptised (Puthanangady).
5. Re-establish the relationship of Eucharist with the table-fellowship of Jesus with all sections of society, so as to invite all those who believe in Him to be allowed to enter into Eucharistic communion (Desmond D'Souza).
6. Make the Eucharist the first sacrament in India which initiates people into church and postpone baptism to a later stage, as the celebration of death and resurrection of Jesus is more meaningful for Hindus than baptism, which is seen as a sign of cultural estrangement (Sara Grant & Felix Wilfred).
7. Focusing on the person of Jesus, form a fellowship of discipleship centred on Him, which is culturally, religiously, and socially part of the Hindu community. This fellowship will not be communally organized but those who acknowledge Christ as decisive for their lives may be allowed into the Eucharistic sharing (M.M. Thomas & Karokaran).

Thus we have here seven suggestions on how the non-baptised Hindu believers in Christ can be admitted into the Eucharist based on three foundations or propositions. We will make a detailed enquiry into all these foundations and suggestions. However, a closer look at the foundations reveals that the third foundation is the resultant effect or the consequence of the first two and calls for a compassionate attitude towards the non-baptised on account of their unique situation. We shall place it together with suggestion number 2 and 3, because of their similarity. Thus, we have two theses for detailed examination. Similarly, there are some commonalities in the seven suggestions. The first suggestion speaks about the need to discard baptism as a pre-condition for entrance into the Eucharistic communion in the way the first century Christians discarded circumcision. Since we have already dealt with the problem of circumcision and baptism (5.2.2.1 & 5.2.2.2) we do not wish to repeat it here. Suggestions 2 and 3 propose ways and means of accepting the non-baptised into the Eucharistic communion. Therefore, we can put them together and tie it with the earlier mentioned third thesis. This becomes our third thesis for our detailed examination, namely, considering the cultural and legal difficulties the devotees of Christ face in accepting baptism and

based on their faith in Christ, they may be accepted into the Eucharistic communion. Thus we have now three theses for the detailed examination. Suggestions 4, 5, 6, and 7 have to be treated separately as they follow a different course or flow. Since suggestion 1 is already treated and 2 and 3 together form our third thesis and need lengthy discussions, we shall now examine suggestions 4, 5, 6, and 7.

Suggestion 4 speaks about the need for introducing a new ritual which could be attended by both the baptised and non-baptised. However, this will not solve our difficulties in sharing the Eucharist with the non-baptised people. This suggestion at most might be a step in taking us closer to the aim. We have the *satsaṅgs* in the *Khrist Bhakta* movement, which is a celebration of the Word where both baptised and non-baptised are taking part.

Suggestion 5 pleads for the re-establishment of the relationship of the Eucharist with the table-fellowship of Jesus with all sections of society. This suggestion does not seem to solve the problem. The Eucharist, in the Catholic understanding, is not a mere continuation of the tablefellowship of Jesus, although it has some relation to it. The meal character of the Eucharist is bound to the sacrificial character of the Eucharistic celebration¹²¹¹. Joachim Jeremias convincingly argues that the last supper was not an ordinary meal but it was a Passover meal¹²¹². By recovering its link with the table-fellowship of Jesus, we may not be able to invite the non-baptised persons to the Eucharist because the Catholic Church primarily understands the Eucharist as the remembrance of Jesus' death and resurrection and not as a table-fellowship.

Suggestion 6 wants to make the Eucharist in the Indian situation the first sacrament that initiates people into faith while postponing the sacrament of baptism to a later stage because, in India, baptism roots out people from their culture, while participating and receiving the Eucharist is seen as a spiritual activity. Hindus do not have any negative feeling for its members joining the Eucharist and sharing it. We have seen that Hindu understanding allows its members to have any god as one's favourite, *iṣṭdevātā*. But receiving baptism is seen as changing the community and culture. Moreover, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are more easily perceived by the Hindus in Eucharist than in baptism. Looking from the side of the non-baptised people, especially from the side of the *Khrist Bhaktas*, it is a welcome suggestion. If we take this suggestion together with the suggestion put forward by one of the staff members (Fr. Vineeth) who advocated *dīkṣā* for the seriously committed devotees, then we could say that those who have received *dīkṣā* may be considered as belonging to the new *ecclesia* and thus they may be admitted to the Eucharist. From the side of the church, it will have to re-think its sacramental theology. Edward J. Kilmartin cautions that if the order of sacraments is changed, the Eucharist may be conceived as merely the ritual expression of a desire for a divine gift. He thinks this because of the similarity of the elements in non-Christian religions

¹²¹¹ KILMARTIN, *The Eucharist in the West*, p. 340.

¹²¹² J. JEREMIAS, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, London, SCM Press, 1966, pp. 41-61.

where they express only one meaning, something social and interpersonal located at the level of human experience. But the Eucharist has a deeper dimension having consequences for the practice of a life of faith¹²¹³. There is also a need to look at the reactions and responses of traditional Catholics to this suggestion, since we do not want to estrange the faithful or force any dispute. However, once this suggestion is put into practice, then it will be a step forward in forming a new model of ecclesia for India.

Suggestion 7 speaks about the importance of focusing on the person of Jesus and forming communities of disciples of Jesus which are culturally, socially, and even religiously part of the Hindu community. This fellowship will not be organized by dividing or separating people on the basis of their legal community. Those who acknowledge Christ as decisive for their lives may be allowed into the Eucharistic sharing while remaining in their respective communities. The *Khrish Bhakta* movement is the real reflection of what this suggestion says. Until now it was presented only as an ideal for the future, but now we have such a living community called the *Khrish Bhaktas*.

We shall now take up the three theses for our detailed examination and enquiry. The first thesis says that there is a wrong perception of Christianity due to which baptism is seen not as a sign of faith but as a betrayal of one's family, nation, and culture, and a sign of cultural transference from India to the West. As we have seen, baptism also has legal consequences for the baptised person who would, as a result, fall under Christian Personal Law.

First, should the Church accept this wrong perception? Is it not the duty of the Church to correct it and clarify the position of the Church that baptism was and is never an initiation into a culture but to a faith and a religion? Should the Church not make clear the distinction between the religion and culture? The Church proclaims that it is not tied to any particular culture, ethnicity, or nation. Baptism was and is intended to be a universal sign of one's incorporation into Christ and his body, the Church, a sign which can be used by people of any culture, ethnicity, and nation. Baptism results in a way of life uniting the baptised to the risen Lord and to each other, making possible genuine interpersonal relations based neither on blood nor on ethnicity, but on a common spirit shaped by the Spirit of God. The Church holds the view that baptism is not a means of changing the culture but a sign of conversion of the heart to God.

Second, the Church teaches that baptism was instituted by Christ and is the basis of Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit, and the door that gives access to the other sacraments. Thus, baptism is the will of Christ who sent the apostles to make disciples of all nations and to baptise them (Matt 28,19). Moreover, according to the teaching of the Church, baptism is not simply a seal of conversion, or an external sign indicating conversion of the heart; rather, it is "the sacrament which signifies and effects rebirth from the Spirit, establishes real and unbreakable bonds with the Blessed Trinity and make us members of the Body of

1213 KILMARTIN, *Christian Liturgy. Theology and Practice*, Kansas City, Sheed & Ward, 1988, p. 272.

Christ, which is the Church”¹²¹⁴. Just because there is a wrong perception of baptism, should the Church do away with it? Is it not enough that the Church makes clear its stand on baptism and its relation to culture?

Third, the Church teaches that loyalty to Christ takes precedence over loyalty to family or any other relationships when the two come in conflict. Does not accepting Christ bring with it the challenges associated with it? Does not Christ demand the primary place over and against even the family and all the other relations of this world? Does not Christ demand the unconditional love and commitment to the point of loving Him more than one’s life (Matthew 10, 37 & Luke 14, 26)? Therefore, for those who want to follow Jesus, should they not be ready to accept baptism and face the consequences of that commitment?

Fourth, the Church does not demand the baptised to abandon his or her original socio-cultural group. On the contrary, the Church wants the Christian faith to be inculturated in every culture, and to integrate into Christianity the authentic cultural values and insert Christianity in the various human cultures¹²¹⁵. The Catholic Church encourages the local churches to incarnate into the cultures and to introduce these cultures into the life of the Church. Thus, the Church wants to insert itself into all the cultures and become truly local (more details in 2.2).

However, clarifying the position of the Church is quite different from what is perceived by others as practised by the Church. We have seen that in practice there is an amalgamation of western culture and Christianity and that baptism becomes associated in India with initiation into culture instead of religion or faith. The ideas of culture, religion, and faith are understood differently in India and the West. The Church is using the western theological categories of religion, culture, and faith while, in India, the Hindu categories of culture, religion, and faith are used. Therefore, even when the Church repeats its position that baptism is not intended to change culture, but only religion, still, baptism as practised and understood in India, transfers the baptised from Hindu culture to western culture.

The Church teaches that baptism is a universal sign of commitment to Christ. But in India it is practiced and understood not as a universal sign but as a particular one, namely, as tied to western culture and understanding. Therefore, even though not intended by the Church, there exists a gap between what is preached as ideal and what outsiders perceive as happening when one is baptised. Although the Church does not intend to break the people away from their culture, the practice of baptism in the Indian situation uproots the people from their culture. Therefore, the gap cannot be adjusted by cosmetic changes, or by explaining the position of the Church since the moment one is baptised, culturally speaking, one is seen as leaving his culture by his Hindu neighbours, and, legally, one changes over from Hindu Personal Law to Christian Personal Law. Therefore, our clarifications that the Church does not want the baptised to change his or her culture falls on deaf ears.

1214 JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 47.

1215 *Ibid.* 52.

It is true that Christ demands unconditional commitment and the primary place in the life of a disciple. One should be willing to give up everything including one's life for the sake of discipleship. Loyalty to Christ should take the prime place even above the family relations. In the *Khrish Bhakta* movement, the devotees are committed to Christ. Many of them have suffered for his name. In spite of facing ridicule and physical violence, they are committed to Him. The crux of the problem is not about their commitment to Christ, but about accepting baptism as a sign of that commitment. Baptism in India is not seen as a sign of commitment to Christ. It is viewed and carried out as a threat to the identity, integrity, and self-government of the people even to the point of their right to exist¹²¹⁶. It is practised as proselytization and breaking the communities. It is plucking the people out of their culture, negating their culture, and destroying their identity and the basic frame of reference (5.2.1.). Culture pervades human beings in all dimensions so much so that to be human is to be cultural¹²¹⁷. It is due to socio-cultural reasons that an individual is unable to come out of the society and have fellowship with the Church. On a theological level, baptism should be the beginning of experiencing the Lord, leading to communion on horizontal and vertical planes, and not a means as practised in India for rooting out people from their culture¹²¹⁸. In the cultural context of India, the theological meaning of baptism is invisible thereby giving a wrong idea of baptism. We may agree that the Church does not demand the baptised to abandon their socio-cultural group; nevertheless, in India, baptism has this result.

Hence, we have two voices here, namely, the voice of the Church (insiders) and the voice of the Hindus (outsiders). Which voice should be given primacy? Arguments could be devised in favour of or against both. Instead of giving primacy to one or the other, the experience of the persons who accept baptism may be given the central place. If the baptised experience what the Church promises, then the voice of the Church shall claim primacy; if the experience of the outsider proves correct, then the claims of the outsiders should be given primacy.

There is also the legal issue to deal with. In order to address this issue, we have already made our suggestions in 5.2.5.2. On a theological level, efforts should be made so that baptism is not viewed as a social act but as a religious act by which the theological meaning of baptism becomes visible.

The second thesis says that the Church, in the context of India, by not accepting the Indian culture, mind-set, and world view, is seen as remaining a particular entity tied to western culture. Therefore, the Church should accept as its own the Indian culture that includes Indian religious forms and an Indian worldview as the starting point to make the Church seen as universal.

The Church never wants to be anything but universal. The understanding of this universality implies that the Church is both universal and particular at the

1216 A. KAROKARAN, 'Cultural Alienation of Converts and Radical Inculturation of Faith', in J. MATTAM & S. KIM (eds.), *Mission and Conversion*, p. 155.

1217 BOFF, *New Evangelization*, p. 5.

1218 KAVUNKAL, *To Gather them into One*, p. 213.

same time. The universality of the Church is expressed in the particularity. There is no universal as such. What is important is that the Church remains open to all cultures and nations and does not remain limited to any ethnicity, culture, language, or race. The Church is also both divine and human at the same time. Since it is divine, it has the capacity and the call to incarnate and permeate every culture. The Church admits that it can accept any culture, and adopt any way of life as it belongs to a supernatural order and is not tied to any created structure. Its function as a mystical reality in society and culture is compared to the leaven which disappears in the fermenting mass. It is concretely “incarnated” in a culture or in many cultures. It is by being “incarnated” in many and different cultures that the universality is made visible.

However, this “incarnation” indeed sets boundaries. Therefore, the Church is seen as a visible human society with a divine mission, having set boundaries. Although it has the capacity and call to incarnate in every culture, western culture is considered as “ideal” due to some insiders’ biases and often accepts only elements from other cultures. Even when the Church admits the importance of other cultures, western mono-culturalism is still regarded as normative for Christians everywhere¹²¹⁹. As we have already seen (5.2.2.2), despite the recent theoretical abandonment of its normativity, western culture as the ideal, still functions as a desired ecclesiastical subculture. Therefore, Hillman calls the Church to get away from what he calls a “chronic monoculturalism”.¹²²⁰ Others encourage the emergence of authentic expressions of Church in different cultures¹²²¹. In the Indian situation, it could mean that the Church accepts the particular cultural forms and the religious world of Hinduism and makes these its own cultural form and religious world, accepting the Hindu framework as its framework. As far as one can observe, the Church is willing to assimilate the cultural forms of Hinduism or any other culture or religion but only into the existing Christian framework. But Hinduism is more than a religion. It is not a religion in the same way Christianity and Islam are. Hinduism does not fit into the categories of the western understanding of religion. Therefore, all the previous efforts to assimilate cultural forms of Hinduism into Christianity have not succeeded. It seems that the Indian view of religion and culture is understood by the Church through European categories. The Church projects the western notion of religion and culture on to Hinduism though it does not fit Hinduism; Hindus project their notion of religion and culture on to the Church though it does not fit it¹²²². The Hindus in general do not understand the Christian meaning of baptism as a sign of faith-commitment while Christians in general do not grasp the Hindu objection to baptism as a sign of faith-commitment.

1219 HILLMAN, ‘Missionary Approaches to African Cultures Today’, p. 39.

1220 E. HILLMAN, *Towards an African Christianity. Inculturation Applied*, Mahwah, Paulist Press, 1993, p. 4.

1221 T.P. RAUSCH, *Towards a Truly Catholic Church. An Ecclesiology for the Third Millennium*, Minnesota, The Liturgical Press, 2005, p. 179.

1222 STAFFNER, ‘Conversion to Christianity Seen from the Hindu Point of View’, p. 247.

The nucleus of the problem seems to be the heterogeneous understanding of religion and culture, because of the different worldviews or frameworks operating behind it. This is not just a meeting of two cultures or religions, but an encounter of the two diverse worldviews whose basic assumptions, ways of thinking, especially with regard to religion, culture, and faith, do not match. Ideally, the efforts for inculturation should go further than admitting cultural elements into the existing Christian framework to the acceptance of the world view as well.

Christians understand their religion as a religion rooted in history. They speak of the salvation history, a history of God's action in the human history. It deals with real people who lived in a definite period of time and space. It means that God is at work in and through historical events, although not all events reveal God's work with the same intensity. The salvation history in Judaism is particularly rooted in the exodus experience. The Jews remember it as the great act of God¹²²³. Just as the Exodus stood for the mighty act of God in the Old Testament, the Christ Event, or more concretely, the Easter Event, becomes the mighty act of God for the New Testament writers. They see Christ and the Christ Event which is central to their faith as the definitive act of God for the salvation of all people. As the first century Christians entered into dialogue with and gradually dominated Mediterranean civilization, the fathers of the Church attempted to explain the message and significance of Christ in the language of the new culture submitting to its demands for cosmological rather than historical explanations and drawing heavily on its philosophy, especially its anthropology¹²²⁴. Although they considered Scripture as the norm for theology, gradually they realized that they could not be limited by the explanatory categories of the Scriptures¹²²⁵. Remember Rahner's point of comparing the present situation to the situation of Paul in which Paul amalgamated the Hellenistic-Mediterranean culture with Judeo-Christianity, where a caesura, a new beginning is involved¹²²⁶. The Indian situation calls for a new "caesura" or a reinterpretation in the light of this one great event, just like it was done by Paul and the fathers of the Church in the initial years of the Christian era. There is a need to rediscover Christianity in India in a new framework. Also the universality of the Church should not be seen as a finished product. The full universality is an assignment towards which it is progressing. Therefore, the Church, by incarnating itself into the Hindu culture and framework and renewing it from within will be taking a step further in its growth towards universality. We stress that caution should be maintained so as not to

1223 H. KISTNER, E.L. PETERMAN & J.E. FALLON, 'Salvation History', in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia* 2nd ed., Vol.12, p. 998.

1224 J.P. BURNS, 'The Economy of Salvation. Two Patristic Traditions', in *Theological Studies* 37, 1976, p. 598.

1225 The key Greek term *homoousios* used by the fathers of the church to explain the Christological doctrine at the first ecumenical council at Niceaea in 325, to affirm that God the Son and God the Father are of the same substance comes not from Christian scripture but from the Greek Gnostics. See A. GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 1, *From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon*, London, Mowbrays, 1975, p. 109.

1226 RAHNER, *Theological Investigations* 15, p. 85.

allow Christianity to fall prey to the Indian cultural bondage. The Gospel should not be subsumed under cultural compulsions.

The third thesis argues that there are cultural and legal difficulties for the devotees to enter the baptised community. However, the devotees display their commitment to Christ by the proclamation of their faith in Christ as the only saviour, their participation in the Eucharist, *satsaṅgs*, family, and village prayer-meetings, their earnestness in listening to the Word of God, and their effort in living a life of discipleship of Christ. Taking into consideration these two aspects, the thesis wants to consider the devotees as belonging at least partially to the community of Christ. This thesis wants to stretch the boundaries of the Church, and to develop a new ecclesiology by which the non-baptised devotees of Christ may be considered as belonging to the baptised community, the Church. Normally, baptism initiates the people into the Church. This thesis proposes that in the place of baptism the willing public participation of the non-baptised devotees, their commitment to Christ in spite of the adverse atmosphere from family and society, and even the suffering they have undergone for the sake of their faith in Christ, may be accepted as a sign of their contact with Christ. In Romans 2, 14-16 Paul says that Spirit of God, who is of course the same as the Spirit of Christ, writes His law in the hearts of all. Those who accept that law may not know that what they are accepting is the Spirit of Christ. Still, they really accept that Spirit of Christ, if they do what He tells them in their hearts to do. Such people have what is called an implicit faith. But in the *Khrist Bhakta* movement, there is not just the existence of implicit faith but more than that. The devotees express their faith in Christ openly, but the reception of baptism is absent on account of reasons beyond their power.

On the ecclesial level, there is a difference between the community of the baptised and the non-baptised. It is one thing to appreciate the faith of the *Khrist Bhaktas*, but it is another thing to do away with the very basic sacrament which unites and forms the community called the Church. This is because there is a Church that the devotees were able to come to Christ. And the Church comes into existence by the sacrament of baptism. We agree that their devotional practices and life manifest their commitment to Christ. However, the individual faith of devotees is not enough for their inclusion in the Eucharistic communion. The catechumens are also people who have faith in Christ and who are committed to Christ. They are also not allowed into the Eucharistic communion since they are not in full communion with Church, even though they may be present at the Eucharistic celebration. The Eucharist is the most important sacrament of the Church. One is united to Christ in Baptism which is renewed through the reception of Eucharist. By baptism one is accepted into the household of God where one is nourished by the Eucharist. One's participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice and the reception of the Eucharist perfects in him the gifts given to him in baptism. Thus, it is baptism that leads one to Eucharist. Moreover, the Church has clear rules and set principles which have been followed in the long history and tradition of the Church on who can receive the Eucharist. Ultimately, baptism

and Eucharist are sacraments instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church. Sacraments are an integral part of what it means to be a Catholic and are special gifts that form people into a community. Because there are cultural and legal difficulties in India in administering baptism, should the Church discard or disregard what was instituted by Christ?

The situation of the *Khrish Bhaktas* is a unique case unseen in the history of the Church. Their case calls for a different solution than what was practiced by the Church. The sacraments of the Church are meant for those belonging to the Church. We have given several suggestions and their implications on how the *Khrish Bhaktas* may be considered as belonging to the Church (see 5.2.5). Perhaps, it is the local church that can understand the situation and take responsible action in finding a solution to the problem.

Before we proceed further, let us now summarize the views of those opposing the inclusion of the non-baptised to the Eucharistic communion. First of all, we shall present the views from the reports of the above-mentioned seminar. Thereafter, we shall also abridge the main points from the guidelines and the teaching of the Catholic Church already elaborated earlier (5.3.2). Subsequently, we shall encapsulate them into short theses and examine them and finally find out which arguments, whether the ones in favour of admitting devotees or the ones against it, carry more weight.

The opposing views from the report of the group discussions of the above-mentioned seminar say that baptism and Eucharist are sacraments of a community, one initiating people or giving them membership while the other giving further spiritual benefits¹²²⁷. People are not baptised into a culture but to a faith. Baptism is the expression of one's commitment to Christ and the community of such committed faithful is called church. In addition, the Eucharist is the expression of Christ in the Church as a community, sharing Himself with each individual who renews his or her commitment in the sacrifice of Mass. Therefore, they think that the sequence cannot be ignored. Further, they argue that just like each family has its inner sanctuaries and private spaces, which others have to respect however close they may be, each religion also has its own ritual worship that constitutes this inner sanctuary and private space. An unrestricted participation in ritual worship would, in the long run, become an obstacle to dialogue rather than a help. They are also of the opinion that in order to avoid syncretism, we should not deliberately promote *communicatio in sacris*¹²²⁸.

We can summarize these arguments and the guidelines of the Church on sharing Eucharist which we had explained earlier (5.3.2) into the following 8 points.

1227 PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Sharing Worship*, pp. 762-763.

1228 *Ibid.* p. 743.

1. There exists an intrinsic connection between baptism and Eucharist. Eucharist is the sacrament of a community, a sacrament in which the baptised renew their commitment to Christ and Christ gives Himself to them.
2. People of all cultures can accept baptism and enter the community called the Church.
3. Allowing the non-baptised into the Eucharist will amount to syncretism.
4. The reception of the Eucharist implies an existing unity of the members who share the communion.
5. The Eucharist simultaneously produces and demands the unity of the Church.
6. The reception of the Eucharist is the highest expression of a living and visible unity of faith and life with the community which celebrates the Eucharist. Sharing the Eucharist, therefore, implies the sharing of the same faith.
7. Even with those who are baptised in another church, there cannot be Eucharistic communion when there is no full ecclesial communion due to differences in doctrine, deficiency of the sacred Orders, and lack of apostolic succession not counting exceptions.
8. Reception of baptism in the Catholic Church implies the sharing of the same faith which gives the baptised all the gifts of the Church including the Eucharist.

We shall condense and encapsulate these eight points into following three theses. First, the Eucharist is the sacrament of the baptised community called the Church. Second, the reception of the Eucharist implies the sharing of the same faith and visible unity; hence, as long as there is no ecclesial communion, Eucharistic sharing cannot be done. Third, the means of achieving this visible unity or entering the ecclesial communion is through the reception of baptism.

The first thesis says that the Eucharist is the sacrament of the baptised community called the Church. There is no disagreement about this thesis that it is the sacrament of the Church. We believe that the Eucharist is instituted by Christ and is entrusted to the Church by which divine life is dispensed to us¹²²⁹.

The second thesis says that the reception of the Eucharist implies the sharing of the same faith and visible unity. As long as there is no ecclesial communion, Eucharistic sharing cannot be done since it is those who share the same faith that come together for the celebration of Eucharist. We also agree that the reception of the Eucharist shall imply the sharing of the same faith. We know that for Catholics the celebration of the Eucharist is a sign of the reality of this oneness of faith, life, and worship. Therefore, those who do not share this oneness are not admitted to the Eucharistic communion. We do not advocate admitting to the Eucharistic communion those who do not share this faith. But what about those who share the same faith but do not share the same visible unity?

The third thesis speaks about the means of achieving this visible unity or entering the ecclesial communion which is through the reception of baptism. Normally, those who share the faith are incorporated into the Church by baptism, Eu-

¹²²⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1131.

charist, and Confirmation. From the early days of the Church, baptism was regarded as the universally accepted rite of entering the Church¹²³⁰. People belonging to various and different cultural, national, social, and religious backgrounds could enter the church through baptism and could continue to live in their socio-cultural milieu. Baptism was understood both as a sign of faith and as a means of entering the visible unity of the Church but it did not mean changing over to a new culture or people, although it had its effect in the lives of the recipients. The view about baptism as a sign, which can be accepted by people of any culture while still keeping their culture, is not in tune with the Hindu view of culture and religion. In India, each religion is generally associated with one cultural stream. Therefore, conversion to Christianity by accepting baptism has been seen as a change from one cultural tradition to another. Thus, a universal understanding of baptism is lost in the context of India and it is seen as tied to European culture.

In the Indian context, the idea of belonging to the Church by the reception of baptism, or, in the strict sense, the idea of membership in the religious sphere is against the religious and cultural ethos of Hinduism. We have already mentioned several times that in the Indian context baptism is not an expression of commitment to Christ, but a transfer from Indian culture to western culture. According to Stanley J. Samartha, it makes little sense in the Indian situation when Christians say that conversion is “conversion to God” and not a “change of community” as the two are identical for an Indian mind¹²³¹. Conversion as traditionally understood and practiced was a product of traditional (western) Christianity and cannot be applied unchanged to a different culture. Western patterns of conversion are now regarded as inappropriate¹²³². In India, the external perception of baptism is not as a sign of spiritual transformation but as a social or cultural change. Therefore, baptism as a requirement for including the *Khrish Bhaktas* into the Eucharistic communion is not suitable for the Indian context (see for details our section in 5.2.1).

It is true that baptism in the case of an adult person presupposes faith and in its absence, it is difficult to judge if one has real faith or not. However, is baptism the only option? Or when the theological meaning of baptism is lost in the context of India or the universal understanding of baptism is lost in the Indian context, how shall we understand, ecclesially, those who display the same faith in Christ but are not able to be baptised? What about those who share the same faith, but who are unable to receive baptism due to the difficulties already mentioned earlier? The Indian situation calls for a reconsideration of the whole initiation process into the ecclesial life. Either a new initiation rite suitable for India is needed or the enlargement of the concept of the church is required so as to include into communion those who are sharing the same faith but who are not able

1230 J.N.D. KELLY, *Early Christian Doctrine*, New York, Harper Collins, 1978, p. 193.

1231 S.J. SAMARTHA, ‘Partners in Community. Some Reflections on Hindu-Christian Relations Today’, in *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* 4, 1980, 2, p. 80.

1232 S.C.H. KIM, ‘Understanding Religious Conversion’, in R.E. HEDLUND & P.J. BHAKIARAJ (eds.), *Missionology for the 21st Century. A South Asian Perspective*, Delhi/Chennai, ISPCK/MIIS, 2004, p. 554.

to enter it by the theologically normal practice of baptism due to sociological and cultural reasons beyond their control. The Church acknowledges plurality of ecclesial life and organization. There are 23 *sui iuris* churches with lots of variations in their church disciplines but all of them are in the Catholic communion. Similarly, can we not accept the *Khrist Bhakta* movement as a unique way of being church and as a valid form of ecclesial life? We have seen the rich religious and faith practices of the devotees, which reflect their strong faith.

We have seen the arguments in favour and against including the non-baptised believers in Christ to the Eucharistic sharing. Those who are against argue that Christianity makes a clear distinction between religion and culture. They maintain that baptism was never intended to initiate people into a culture but to a religion. They assume that the Christian faith can be practiced from within every culture. Faith in Christ brings its challenges and baptism is a concrete step, a decisive element in one's commitment to Christ, which can be understood universally as a sign of one's acceptance of Christian faith.

Those who are in favour argue that baptism as a sign of commitment to Christ and as a means of entering the church is not in tune with the Indian culture but tied to the western cultural heritage. They value the Indian cultural and religious framework as important and as having its own right to exist and they want the church to accept it as its own. They maintain that it is not a lack of faith but cultural and legal problems that prevent the *Bhaktas* from receiving baptism. Therefore, they reason that recognizing their faith in Christ, while considering the legal and cultural difficulties the devotees face in accepting baptism, the devotees should be accepted into the community of disciples of Christ and they may be allowed to the Eucharistic sharing.

Interestingly, both sides agree that the devotees do have faith in Christ. Similarly, both sides agree that the Eucharist is the sacrament of the community of the baptised. There is also agreement about baptism as the means of entrance into the community of the baptised in the normal instance. There is also no disagreement about baptism and the Eucharist as sacraments constituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church.

However, the way in which we call for re-interpretation of the Christian faith in terms of a Hindu framework remains to be answered. The universal understanding of baptism as a sign of commitment to Christ is locked in horns with the Indian legal system and cultural understanding. The possibility of a universally undisputed understanding of baptism and, therefore, baptism as a sign of faith-commitment is questioned in the Indian context. The theological meaning of baptism is side-lined in this context. Until now, there was the debate about the theory and practice of "Christ and culture". In such discussions, a distinction between religion and culture was taken for granted. However, in the context of India, to this discussion we make a plea to add the dimension of "Christ and religion" so as to look at the possibility and the need to accept the "Hindu religion" as part of the culture and to accept Christ into the Hindu framework and culture which include

religion. The present “Christian framework” is accused of having a particular western worldview. This is a unique Indian situation and Christianity has not known such precedents, and so history does not offer a ready solution. This debate calls our attention to the need for the Church to take shape in cultures with non-western frameworks.

After seeing both these sides, it seems that a genuine pastoral concern for the situation of the devotees calls for a re-thinking of the ecclesiological and sacramental practices. There is a plea to consider the particular situation of the devotees sympathetically and to give them preferential attention over the practices handed down through the ages, without damaging the traditional views on sacraments. Christ came to give life and to give it in its fullness. In the Eucharist, He continues to give His life to those who receive Him. The reception of that life in the Eucharist is limited to those belonging to the Church. Accepting baptism and joining the community are important means of receiving that life. But what about those who are unable to receive baptism due to no fault of their own, but who are eager to receive the life Christ offers in the Eucharist? A pastoral concern for such people who are committed to Christ yet cannot enter the baptised community invites concrete action in terms of re-thinking our ecclesiological and sacramental practices and looks for alternatives that genuinely benefit both the Church and the *Khrish Bhaktas*.

5.3.5. *Eucharistic Sharing with the Khrish Bhaktas- a Hypothetical Situation*

In this short sub-section we shall explore the pros and cons of what would happen if the devotees were admitted to the Eucharistic communion. It will be a hypothetical case. Considering the particular situation, suppose the authorities of the Church make an exception and admit the *Khrish Bhaktas* to the Eucharistic communion. What positives and negatives can we expect for the devotees, the Church in India and the Church universal, the Eucharist, and the Hindu neighbours in relation to Christianity? We shall first present the positive side of each item followed immediately by the presentation of the negative side. There will be some overlaps of implications due to the relationships between them.

5.3.5.1. *Implications for the Khrish Bhaktas*

On a positive note, the *Bhaktas* will not be looked down on as forsakers or defectors of Indian culture and their commitment to the nation will not be questioned. There will be opportunity for them to be Hindus and Christians at the same time. It will nurture the *Khrish Bhaktas* spiritually by the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ for which they long. The reception of the Eucharist will strengthen their spiritual pilgrimage and enhance their desire to remain united more closely to Christ. Many devotees have suffered physically, socially, and psychologically for faithfully living their life as *Khrish Bhaktas*. The reception of the Eucharist will

give them much satisfaction and spiritual encouragement for all the troubles they have undergone. It will be a great step forward in augmenting their relationship with Jesus and can result in an intimate union with Christ which is one of the principle fruits of the reception of the Eucharist as described by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*¹²³³. The celebration and reception of the Eucharist challenges the recipients to live what has been celebrated. Hence, it will encourage them to fight against the inequality and other injustices prevalent in the society. Thus, it will preserve the *Bhaktas* in grace and help them to live out the paschal mystery enacted in the Eucharist.

On the negative side, however, the question that remains unanswered is: Will the devotees be able to grasp the meaning and sacredness of the Eucharist as understood by the Church? Will they not equate the celebration of the Eucharist with that of *puja* which they have in their temples and the reception of the Eucharist with the *prasād*? The *prasād* in Hinduism does not effectuate a spiritual communion but only a preparation or purification and a pre-condition. The real communion is possible only through a mystical experience¹²³⁴. The reception of the Eucharist ideally should encourage the receiver to grow into the mystery of the Eucharist and enable him or her to commit oneself to the poor and to be united with one another¹²³⁵.

Second, the admission of the devotees to Eucharistic communion eliminates the segregation of the devotees at the reception of the Eucharist. Our earlier section has shown how the *Khrist Bhaktas* are asked not to come forward for receiving the Eucharist, or are sent away from the queue or are given some substitute after the distribution of communion. By allowing the devotees to accept the Eucharist, this segregation will no longer exist. They will feel fully accepted as members of the community and will not be deprived of the most important spiritual food for their spiritual life.

On the negative side, this practice will be against the long tradition and teaching of the Church. The Eucharist is the sacrament of the Church meant for those in communion. The ecclesial meaning of the Eucharist may be lost and the guidelines of the Church are by-passed when non-baptised devotees are included in the Eucharistic communion. This will be acting against the very concepts of the Church and sacrament. The Catholic Church understands the very community gathered for the Eucharist as a real foretaste of the fullness of the Kingdom¹²³⁶. The individual faith of a devotee is good but not enough for admission to Eucharistic communion. The Church gives primary importance to the ecclesial communion with regard to the practice of Eucharistic sharing. A non-Catholic believer is given prominence over the ecclesial only by way of exception and under

1233 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1391.

1234 MATAJI, 'A Worship beyond Worship', in PUTHANANGADY (ed.), *Sharing Worship*, p. 762.

1235 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1391 to 1398.

1236 W.T. CAVANAUGH, *Torture and Eucharist*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1998, p. 228.

certain conditions like in the case of a threat of death or in the case of grave necessity and pressing spiritual need. The Church as a community wants those who have faith in Christ to enter it through baptism.

Faith and the sacrament of baptism are intimately linked in the Catholic teaching and practice. On the one hand, baptism presupposes faith, particularly in the adult convert, and on the other hand, the faith of the baptised person lives and grows through the baptismal experience. After baptism, the baptised person grows in faith. Thus, baptism both creates and presupposes faith. Similarly, faith leads to baptism and faith grows from baptism. Those who are members of the Church became members because of their faith and so the very fact that they belong to the Church is taken as the sign of their faith. We also accept that baptism without faith is empty ritualism. Baptism in the Catholic Church presupposes faith which is considered as the gift of God. In the case of the catechumens, faith is strengthened and deepened during the catechumenate preceding the baptism. The earlier mentioned rules and directions (5.3.2) on who can receive the Eucharist demonstrate that admittance to Eucharist depends on the ecclesial body the person in question belongs to. In this case the ecclesial communion is taken as a sign of orthodoxy in faith. In addition, the one who has faith in Christ enters into the communion and acquires membership in the Catholic Church by receiving baptism.

However, we have amply made it clear that such communion based on membership is not possible for the devotees, but they can belong to the Church through other means such as desire and faith. Here, the Asian understanding of membership or belonging can come to our aid.

From the Asian perspective [also from the European perspective] to be in the community of Jesus is much more than a question of being a member of a well-defined group marked off from the rest by clearly defined identity and conditions of membership. The conception of identity of one's self - individual or collective - is something quite alien in our parts of Asia. Here the identity of one's self is not in contrast to the other but in *relation* to the other. It is the relationship which defines identity¹²³⁷.

We need to accept various levels of belonging. Karl Rahner says that there are presumably very many people who do not belong to the Church in terms of sociology of religion or citizenship and yet have the outlook that they are involved in a positive relationship to the Church together with a merely partial identification with it. He says that in such a situation it becomes still clearer how difficult it is to establish precisely where is the door of the Church in a theological and not merely ecclesial-sociological sense, who is inside and who is outside¹²³⁸. The

1237 WILFRED, *Sunset in the East?*, p. 236. The present researcher adds what is in the parenthesis.

1238 RAHNER, *The Shape of the Church to Come*, p. 98.

unique context of the *Khrist Bhaktas*, pleads for considering them as belonging to the Church in a unique way. This will facilitate their entrance into the Eucharistic communion. Felix Wilfred sees this kind of belonging to the community of discipleship in continuity with the discipleship presented in the Gospels. He says:

Not all the followers belonged to his community in the same way. There was the larger crowd that followed him everywhere he went, enchanted by his teaching, his authority etc. (Matt 4, 23-25). There were the 72 disciples and the twelve. In addition, even among the twelve some were closer to Jesus than the others were. The Sermon on the Mount and the sermon on the plain were addressed not exclusively to the disciples but to the whole crowd as well. The content and form of the missionary instructions given to the twelve (Luke 9, 1-6) were the same as those given to the seventy-two (Luke 10, 1-16)¹²³⁹.

Although we do not approve of the perception of equation of baptism and westernizing, the segregation of devotees at the Eucharist can be resolved by extending the membership of the church to them by accepting the notion of belonging. Traditionally, the Church accepted the baptism of desire as a means of belonging to the Church. *Khrist Bhaktas* who desire baptism but cannot receive it because of something beyond their control may be given its effects by their desire and be considered as belonging to the Church in a unique way. There is nothing wrong in having a community in the name of Jesus who proclaims Him as their only Lord and saviour and at the same time having a Hindu social and cultural background and framework. However, extending Eucharistic communion to such a community as *Khrist Bhaktas*, although not baptised, but regarded as belonging to the Church, may be, in a different degree, an entry into the unknown future and will involve a new caesura, a new beginning.

5.3.5.2. Implications for the Church in India and the Universal Church

By admitting the devotees into Eucharistic communion, we are opening the way for the emergence of a new model of *ecclesia* in India. This model will not be focused on membership, but on faith and belonging, although membership presupposes faith. It means that membership by baptism will not be a precondition for the admittance into Eucharistic communion. It will no longer be necessary for the believers in Christ to change their cultural communities, but they will be able to follow Christ from within their community. Such a practice will not come into conflict with the Indian civil law.

¹²³⁹ WILFRED, *Sunset in the East?*, p. 237.

This will realize the dream of many leaders in the past who wanted to be Christian and Hindu at the same time¹²⁴⁰. The *Khrish Bhakta* movement opens a window for a different ecclesial form where people can be both Hindus and Christians at the same time.

There shall be a genuine fear that in the context of doing away with baptism the existence and spread of the church may encounter problems. G.E. Ladd cautions that mission without baptism may be a superficial solution, also a self-contradiction. He further mentions that baptism finally points to a community gathered together by Jesus Christ, where his redemptive work is acknowledged, experienced, communicated, and carried forward. Its absence will be detrimental¹²⁴¹. Therefore, mission without church or a churchless Christianity cannot be envisaged.

However, we are looking at a church or a community in the name of Jesus, which will carry forward his mission. We are in search of a model where faith incarnates the Indian ethos and worldview, a model which does not take the *Khrish Bhaktas* out of their cultural context. As Karokaran argues, "it is boundless duty of the Church in India to evolve a more open ecclesial structure that does justice to its experience of an interrelatedness and mutual inclusiveness with other religions and their adherents"¹²⁴². As a result, the church that emerges will be different from the model that already exists.

At present, the Catholic Church is the communion of several *sui iuris* churches who share the same beliefs, but have diverse ecclesial life. They have their own unique liturgical, theological, spiritual, and disciplinary patrimony, hierarchy, distinct by the culture and circumstances of history of a people, by which its own manner of living the faith is manifested in each church *sui iuris*¹²⁴³. Although the *Khrish Bhakta* movement cannot be compared with the autonomous and ancient *sui iuris* churches, it can grow as a unique way of being church in line with them. This will indirectly contribute to the universal church by giving a new vibrant model of professing and living Christianity. It may be helpful in this context to look at the Eucharist in the context of life, death, and resurrection of Jesus rather than in the context of Church. But then there is a danger of looking at baptism not as a sacrament instituted by Christ but as an ecclesial institution. Therefore, a possible solution could be to reverse the order of things as depicted in the Gospel of Matthew 28, 19-20, make people His disciples, teach them what he has taught and postpone baptism.

1240 See our earlier section (chapter two) on leaders who wanted to be Hindus and Christians at the same time. Brahmapandav Upadhyaya, the first Hindu Catholic leader in the inculturation and *āśram* movement, called himself a Catholic Hindu. We also saw the idea of Tilak about forming a brotherhood suitable to the Indian character and accepting the believers in Christ as members of the brotherhood without making baptism a formal condition.

1241 G.E. LADD, *A Theology of New Testament*, Michigan, Grand Rapids, 1974, p. 119.

1242 A. KAROKARAN, 'The Relationship of Mission, Conversion and Baptism', in *International Review of Mission* 72, 1983, 287, p. 363.

1243 CCEO, 28.1

The idea of having a new model of Church in India where people will not be pressed to leave their culture in order to belong to Christ is a welcome suggestion. However, the Eucharist should not be used as a means for achieving this ideal. First what is needed is to form an *ecclesia* where the people are not forced out of their cultural and social milieu. Then in that *ecclesia* the Eucharist can become a source and centre of their life. Care must be given that the Eucharist becomes genuinely meaningful for the people of the culture and at the same time it is in continuity with the tradition¹²⁴⁴. Without first defining such an *ecclesia* where the true devotees are part of it, the admittance of devotees to the Eucharist may not result in the formation of a new model.

However, if the *Khrist Bhakta* movement in itself is seen as a well-founded model of *ecclesia*, then this could be an opportunity for a new model of church suitable for India. For this to happen, the church will have to re-think its sacramental theology and whole ecclesial life. Furthermore, it will also have its repercussions on the church within India and outside. The Catholics from the traditional background or even the universal church may not be able or willing to recognize this model as authentic and valid. They may not be able to understand the particular situation of the *Khrist Bhaktas*, turn against the practice, and consider the practice of sharing the Eucharist with them as a sacrilege. It can also cause problems and divisions in the Church. Instead of forming a meaningful model of the church, it can become a point of division or an example of negative inculturation.

Furthermore, the kind of faith presented to the devotees in this context is the catholicized charismatic form of Christianity. This particular form of Christianity also will have its ramifications. This form of Christianity is presented in the context of a Catholic *āśram*. This form seems to appeal to the people from the rural areas. We have seen how the devotees have found the vocal prayer, the communitarian prayer, and the preaching the Word of God and the healing prayers appealing to them. Thus, on the positive side, Christianity comes across to them as a faith that touches their lives. They feel it has immediate impact on them. Pope John Paul II appreciates the presence of the charismatic elements to a certain extent¹²⁴⁵.

On the negative side, not everyone in the Church would approve of this model of Christianity. Longevity of the charismatic elements is also an unresolved problem. The ability of the charismatic form of Christianity to sustain people in the long run is also questioned. What is required is a balance between the poles of the charismatic form and the traditional form. The apostolic pentecostal experience is a model which invites us to be constantly open to the gifts of the Spirit. At the same time, we also must engage in biblical and theological education and be grounded in the total Christian tradition. As we have noted (5.1.2) earlier, the

1244 D.N. POWER, *The Eucharistic Mystery. Revitalizing the Tradition*, New York, Crossroad, 1994, p. 5.

1245 Quoted in V. SYNAN, *Voices of Pentecost. Testimonies of Lives Touched by the Spirit*, Michigan, Servant Publications, 2003, p. 94.

Khrist Bhakta movement has greater stress on Christology and Pneumatology because of the charismatic form of Christianity. More attention should be given to stress the theology of creation, the Trinitarian God, and the mutual relationship between Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the *Bhaktas* have a different framework based on the Hindu worldview. It takes a much longer time for those people who are not accustomed to these concepts to imbibe these theological underpinnings. At the same time, one could also genuinely ask why we do not accept the Hindu worldview as a starting point, of course with necessary corrections and refinements.

5.3.5.3. Implications for the Eucharist

On a theological level, Christ is meant for all people and God wills that all men be saved as is made clear by the scriptures and the documents of the church¹²⁴⁶. The church holds that God desires that everyone should be saved, that Jesus did not die for some human beings, but for the whole humankind, and God loves everyone. The coming of Jesus into the world, his life, death, and resurrection was for the salvation of all humanity. The Eucharist is his parting gift of love to his friends and the embodiment of his sacrificial love for them¹²⁴⁷. When Christ was going to leave His disciples in His proper species, He left Himself with them under the sacramental species¹²⁴⁸. This “unspeakable gift” is entrusted to the Church¹²⁴⁹. “In every Eucharist, Jesus continues to give his body and blood for all humanity”¹²⁵⁰. This gift being entrusted to the church is normally shared among the members of the church who are his disciples. The *Khrist Bhaktas* have come forward to receive this gift. Although not baptised into the Church, they proclaim faith in him and display a genuine desire to follow his ideals and show devotion and faith in him. On a positive note, admission of the *Khrist Bhaktas* to the Eucharistic sharing will enable them to share this great gift and enlarge the community of recipients of the salvation in Christ. This will imply that the church neither owns the Eucharist nor withholds it from anyone on account of cultural reasons but is willing to share it with all those having faith in Him. This will present us with an alternative model of inculturation in India where *Khrist Bhaktas* who cannot accept baptism will be able to be enriched by this self-gift of Christ.

However, one should also keep in mind that historically the Eucharist is understood as instituted by Christ and in the tradition of the Church it was never meant for the uninitiated. In the first centuries, non-baptised persons were not allowed to be present at the celebration of the Eucharist, even the catechumens

1246 1 Timothy 2, 4 and the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Sacrosanctum concilium*, 5.

1247 F.D. KELLY, *The Mystery We Proclaim. Catechesis for the Third Millennium*, Huntington, Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 1999, p. 60.

1248 AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiæ*. III, q.73, art. 5.1.

1249 *Sacrosanctum concilium*, 6.

1250 F. ARINZE, *The Holy Eucharist*, Huntington, Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 2001, p. 121.

were dismissed after the liturgy of the Word. Moreover, the church is a covenant community entered into through baptism. The sacrament of Eucharist is dispensed to those in covenant community. We agree that the Eucharist is entrusted to the church although it does not belong to the church and she does not own it; it is a gracious gift to us from God. We also agree that Christ died for all¹²⁵¹. The duty of the members of the church is to invite other people to enter into this covenant community so that they can also share this communion with Jesus and one another. It is by belonging in and through the local community that one belongs to the universal catholic community. The invitation to this community is universal, meant for all. The Eucharist is a sign of unity and a source of unity. But it is not to be used as an instrument to achieve the universality, but it is the sign of the universality existing in the community. The act of sharing the Eucharist is at once both most personal and most communal¹²⁵². "It is the Church that gives the individual the Body of Christ, which she has in her possession..., for his sanctification, in the unity, love and plenitude of the Spirit of this holy community of God's covenant, and so she fills him with all grace"¹²⁵³. The reception of the Eucharist should happen in the community following its traditions and spiritual disciplines, which the community has inherited from the beginning. All those who believe in him are invited to join the community and enter into a new relationship with Jesus and his community.

The case of the *Khrist Bhaktas* is different. The very fact that they regularly present themselves at the Catholic liturgy itself shows that there is some serious commitment, co-operation, and communion. Their engagement in the preaching of the word and sharing in the prayers is itself a sign and source of unity. Their case may be seen as a legitimate circumstance which requires exception. We do not advocate using the Eucharist as a means of achieving unity but because of the underlying unity already achieved between the baptised and the non-baptised devotees although not in the same manner.

But there is also a dilemma in admitting the *Khrist Bhaktas* to the Eucharist. The uniqueness and importance the Catholics give to the Eucharist may be lost. Instead of enriching the church and forming a new model, it can easily result in the formation of syncretism when considered as a negative concept. The Eucharist, for the members of the Catholic Church, is the corporate act of the ecclesiological community by which it actively participates in the mystery of God in Christ, namely, the New Covenant¹²⁵⁴. The non-baptised persons may not be able to

1251 There are some discussions in many places on the words used at the consecration of the wine in the Eucharist and whether it should be "for many" or "for all". Pope Benedict XVI made it clear that the words "for many" be used since it is in conformity with the scripture and tradition. He argues that the expression "for many" is a more faithful translation of the Latin *pro multis* and adheres more closely to the biblical text and tradition. See http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/letters/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20120414_zollitsch_en.html, accessed on 30.07.2012.

1252 K.W. IRWIN, *Models of the Eucharist*, New York/Mahwah, Paulist Press, 2005, p. 88.

1253 RAHNER, *The Church and the Sacraments*, p. 87.

1254 KILMARTIN, *The Eucharist in the West*, p. 360.

grasp this meaning. It is possible that they see it only as a *prasād* which they normally get from the temple. Furthermore, it is not sure if the *Bhaktas* will be able to grasp that the sacrifice of the Cross and the sacramental renewal in the Eucharist are one and the same differing only in the manner of offering. The Eucharist is at the same time a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, of propitiation and satisfaction¹²⁵⁵. They might consider the Christian faith as one among the many religions in the world and so the uniqueness of the Christian faith may be affected. If the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist is not respected, then the Eucharist may not be considered as something holy and special. Therefore, on the one hand, the meaning of the Eucharist will be misunderstood and, on the other hand, instead of attracting the Hindus to the Catholic faith, it may not attract people any more. Since the Eucharist is given only to those initiated, its holiness is preserved and the same meaning is passed on more effectively and easily. Once that is removed, then the meaning of the Eucharist may get changed and the attraction to the Eucharist and faith in its power may become reduced.

Closely related is the practical difficulty in distinguishing between those devotees who have real faith in the Eucharist and those who do not have such a deep faith. There may be some devotees who share the same faith as the Catholics. But there could also be some others who do not share such faith, but who might show their faith in order to get material or other gains. Moreover, it is not easy to find out if they have full faith in the Eucharist and if they believe in the sacrificial aspect of the Eucharist. We are also not sure if the reception of the Eucharist will enable them to live the mystery they celebrate by challenging the social inequalities present in the society. If the non-devotees disapprove of the practice of the devotees and interpret their acceptance of the Eucharist as a sign of becoming "Christian", will they be able to face the consequences? If their practice leads them to social death will they be able to continue to live as committed *Bhaktas*? We have already seen that some *Bhaktas*, after remaining in the movement for some time, leave the movement altogether. Although it is true that there is no guarantee that the baptised Christians will remain always faithful Christians, still, considering the fluidity of the Hindu religious mind-set, it is easier for Hindus to draw their spiritual strength from different sources. Thus, admitting the devotees to Eucharistic communion without really teaching them about the Eucharist, salvation, and spiritual life can result in divisions rather than unity. As David N. Power says, all of those who take part in the Eucharist may do so in faith and piety, but if they hold to very different ideas about its meaning and its relation to the church, its celebration divides rather than unites¹²⁵⁶.

Without minimising the meaning, significance, and value of the Eucharist, the Church shall share it with those who are willing and ready to live by the demands of the Gospel but who are not in a position to join the Church through bap-

1255 *General Instruction of Roman Missal* 2002, 2. See also D.K. KEENAN, 'The Sacrifice of the Eucharist', in *The Heythrop Journal* 44, 2003, 2, p. 196.

1256 POWER, *The Eucharistic Mystery*, p. 7.

tism due to the external reasons and not due to lack of faith or commitment to Christ. At the same time, it is not our intention to include into the Eucharistic communion those whose faith lacks the resolve to be baptised into the church.

5.3.5.4. Implications for Hindus and Christians in General

By admitting the Hindu devotees of Christ to the Eucharist, we are facilitating the way for them to draw from the treasure of the Christian faith without being branded as deserters of their culture and *dharma*. Hindus will not feel that Christianity is a threat to their culture but will see it as complementary or as a fulfilment of their religious desire. Christianity will then not be viewed as a religion but as a spiritual path. This may encourage more Hindus to become *Khrist Bhaktas*. The reception of the Word of God and the Eucharist will challenge the *Bhaktas* to renew their social life, resulting in a renewal of the society as an outcome. The positive changes in the family and social relations we had seen earlier are a signposts and indicators for further changes.

Additionally, by accepting the *Khrist Bhakta* movement as a model of *ecclesia*, the Christians and missionaries in this context will not be looked at as anti-nationals adamant on destroying the Hindu culture but as fellow pilgrims. This will open up new frontiers in the mission in India and elsewhere.

The Catholic Church is not a threat to any culture and does not want to present itself as a threat either. It wants to present its faith as the fulfilment of the religious or spiritual longing of the people. The Christian faith, of course, challenges the negative aspects of the receiving culture. But it is not against any culture or people as such. The Catholics do not want the devotees to be branded as deserters of their culture. The Christian faith has the capacity to be incultured in every culture while being enriched by that culture.

In our analysis in the earlier section, we have seen that the worldview operating in the movement is mostly the Hindu worldview although there is a slight movement towards the Christian worldview in some instances. Accepting this movement as a model of *ecclesia* has its implication on the mind-set of the people and an effect on the practice of sacramental theology of the church. It will challenge the Church to work with a new worldview and a new mind-set – a travel into the unknown similar to the one it had done in the first millennium by entering the Greek world, which, guided by the Spirit, made of it a successful synthesis.

5.3.6. Baptism and Eucharist: Some Reflections

The discussions on baptism and the Eucharist guide us to look at the uniqueness of the *Khrist Bhaktas* and the need for an ecclesiological model suitable for their context. The *Khrist Bhaktas* are not Catholics. They are not Protestants. They are not baptised and so do not come under the group of ecclesial communities. They are not even catechumens. But at the same time they cannot also be placed

under non-Christians. They are a different and unique group. They are a group in-between. They are a group belonging culturally to Hinduism while committed only to Christ and formed into a fellowship in his name. They are not baptised as members of the church not because of their lack of faith in Christ but because of other external matters. The particular and distinct situation of the *Khrist Bhaktas* invites a different approach with regard to the sacraments and ecclesiology.

Remember that the leaders of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement, and Anil Dev in particular, were very reluctant to the idea of baptising the devotees and making them part of the existing community of Catholics for fear of their losing interest in spiritual matters. Even when he made exceptions and admitted a few of them to baptism he made sure that they were preserved in the community of the *Khrist Bhaktas* and not made part of the Catholic parish. In this context, the need for a new ecclesiology is immediately and strikingly evident. Anil Dev wants to preserve the *Khrist Bhaktas* as *Khrist Bhaktas* and dreams of a higher spiritual life with a closer and deeper following of Christ for them than what is normally practiced by Christians. We need to find ways to acknowledge this as a true ecclesial community, even though it lacks certain aspects of the institutional Church but does not lack much in its commitment to Christ. Therefore, our suggestion of the *āśram*-based charismatic model could be one model worth considering.

Conversion, as traditionally understood and practiced, is in tune with the Western understanding of religion and culture. It cannot be applied unchanged to the Indian cultural context. The very ideas of culture, religion, and faith are understood differently in India and the West. The Church is working with western theological categories of religion, culture, and faith while, in India, the Hindu categories of culture, religion, and faith are used. Therefore, even when the church repeats its position that baptism is not intended to change culture but only religion, still, baptism as practised and understood in India, transfers the baptised from Hindu culture to Western culture. Therefore, what is required is the re-evaluation of the form of conversion in order to find a suitable model, which functions according to the Indian culture. We need such a model that will reflect the change of heart, orientation towards Christ, social commitment to one another, and a personal relationship with Christ. Accepting baptism as result of faith in Christ should make a positive difference in those who accept Him. Christ came to give life in its fullness to those who believe in Him. Baptism should be the beginning of experiencing life in abundance. It is the entrance into the community which receives that life. It should not be a means to remove the believer from his community, which gives him identity as a human person.

The ideological premises and the worldviews of the western form of Christianity and Indian culture and religion are not similar. Christianity is inclined to distinguish between religion and culture and implicitly wants the Indians to make a similar distinction. Therefore, the model of inculturation practiced until now

has not been successful. In the Indian situation, especially in the context of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement, a new attitude is required towards the Indian reality, its religion, and culture. The acceptance of the Gospel does not demand the denouncement of the culture. We have seen that the difference between religion and culture in India is so subtle that it is almost impossible to draw an accurate line of demarcation. To an average Hindu his very religion is his culture. We have seen earlier that they do not even use the term religion but prefer to use the term *dharma*. The Christians want the Hindus to understand the differentiation between religion and culture, while the Hindus want the Christians to understand the relation between *dharma* and a spiritual path. What is feasible and called for is the incarnation and purification of the Gospel in the Indian cultural reality, resulting in a trans-signification of the Indian concept of religion and culture.

In the meeting of Christianity and Hinduism a genuine synthesis of Hindu culture and Christian faith is possible when a Hindu believer in Christ will be able to remain a member of his Hindu community. When this is made possible then acceptance of the Gospel does not lead to the suppression of the culture. The example of the Thomas Christians in South India sheds some light. The Thomas Christians, for centuries, retained their Indian culture while practicing Christianity¹²⁵⁷.

What is happening in the *Khrist Bhakta* movement is a meeting of two cultures with two different worldviews¹²⁵⁸. Is it a process of inculturation or is it a case of a community adopting a faith? Or is it a case of both? What we observe is that the content of the Christian faith is being appropriated and developed by communities of believers through the process of reception¹²⁵⁹. The model of *ecclesia* formed in line with the *Khrist Bhakta* movement will not be the western form. The liturgy, the structure, the symbols, etc., will be different as a result of the interplay and negotiation of the two frameworks.

What is important in such meetings of two different cultures is that when faith is passed from one culture to a new culture, care should be taken to pass on the integrity of the faith. Kevin W. Irwin reminds that even in a change of rite, changes occur to our notions of God, of ourselves, of each other, of grace, of re-

1257 The Thomas Christians remained within the Indian caste society and are regarded by the Hindus as a caste occupying a high place within their caste hierarchy. Earlier they followed the same rules of caste and pollution as that of Hindus and sometimes they were even considered as pollution neutralizers. See for details, B. VADAKKEKARA, *Origins of Christianity in India. A Historiographical Critique*, Delhi, Media House, 2007, pp. 325-330.

1258 Huntington believes that the divisions in humankind in the future will be based on cultural differences. He considers the Hindu civilization and western civilization among 7 or 8 major civilizations in the world with different views on the relations between God and man, the individual and group, the citizen and the state, parents and children, husband and wife, liberty, authority, hierarchy, and rights. See S. HUNTINGTON, 'Clash of Civilizations', in *Foreign Affairs* 72, 1993, pp. 22-25.

1259 RUDDY, *The Local Church*, p. 82.

demption, of the church, etc.¹²⁶⁰. Here it is not the question of just a change in rite but a meeting of two different worldviews. So on a spiritual level, the devotees might be enriched by being accepted to Eucharistic communion, but on a theological level, one is not sure if the Eucharist will keep the same meaning, which the baptised community at large gives to it. The understanding of the devotees and of the believing community of the church about what the Eucharist is and what it does on ecclesiological and eschatological levels has to have a sound correspondence.

The model of ecclesial life presented in the *Khrist Bhakta* movement shows that its boundaries are fluid. Can we call this movement a real form of church? Culturally, it seems valid, but how far is it true theologically? If the church has the capacity and call to “incarnate” in any culture, it should take steps to incarnate itself in the Indian culture and framework. When baptism is perceived as estranging the recipients from their community and culture, should one advocate baptism? At the same time, should the church do away with baptism, which was instituted by Christ, because there are cultural difficulties? How do we reinterpret the Christ-event from the context or within the Hindu framework? Difficulty in answering these questions shall not blunt the absolute opportunity to see the model of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement and reduce it from a model of the church to a means of evangelization. Building an ecclesiology adequate to the new situation in the context of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement is urgent and essential for the existence and future of the Church in India. Without an initiation ceremony, the *Khrist Bhaktas* do not have a bond to keep them as disciples of Christ. However, they form an evangelising community displaying the active presence of the Spirit and forming a community based on Christ. This shows that some form of church is being formed here. Echoing the words of Edward Schillebeeckx, “The church is actively present even where her adequate ecclesial form has not yet appeared”¹²⁶¹.

Finally, in the context of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement, the “incarnational principle” calls us to accept the Indian culture and framework at least as a starting point. What is not assumed is not redeemed. If the Indian situation needs to be evangelized, if an Indian church is to be formed, then faith has to take the flesh of Indian culture. *Ad Gentes* reminds the churches to “implant” themselves into all people and cultures as Christ incarnated into a certain social and cultural condition¹²⁶². The Church has to accept the Indian framework as its own framework and thus incarnate herself in the Indian worldview. This is intended neither to reject the Christ Event as central and decisive nor to dilute the salvific role of Christ. It is also not rejecting the Christian identity and mission. On the contra-

1260 IRWIN, *Models of the Eucharist*, p. 26.

1261 E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *The Language of Faith. Essays on Jesus, Theology and the Church*, Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1995, p. 13.

1262 *Ad gentes*, 10.

ry, we believe that the Christian life is intrinsically related to the Christ Event, to the early Church's Easter experience. The same Christ Event and Easter experience calls us to incarnate the Christian faith in the Indian Hindu framework, a process of dying to resurrect with a new resurrected body. Without first assuming the Indian framework, the Indian church in a real sense, will remain a dream.

Chapter 6

General Conclusion

We have examined the *Khrist Bhakta* movement to find out its contribution to attempts to inculturate the Catholic Church in India in the area of building a community of faith. We wanted to discover to what extent this movement can become a successful model of inculturation for the Church in India in the field of community building. We formulated some criteria to help us judge the success or failure of the movement in this field. Our evaluation has demonstrated that in relation to earlier inculturation efforts, this movement has been successfully tested against most of our criteria as touchstones of successful inculturation. The movement has succeeded in gaining the acceptance of the rural population, who have appropriated the Christian faith within their cultural world while contributing to the Christian faith by offering it new forms of expression. This movement promises a genuine synthesis of Hinduism and Christianity by a negotiation of Christian spirituality with Hindu culture. On the social level, the movement has started to confront the weaknesses in Hindu society, challenging, for example, the caste barrier and, thereby, demonstrating some of the moral improvements that the Christian faith necessarily brings with it. On the spiritual level, the *Khrist Bhaktas* seem to internalize the Christian faith and show signs of spiritual nourishment and renewal.

This movement must, on the other hand, overcome its serious difficulties concerning baptism and Eucharist. This brings us to the second part of our question: To what extent can this movement become a model of the Church in India? It falls too far short of realising the strict meaning of the term *ecclesia* to reckon it as a proper model for the Church in India, on account of its lack of the sacrament of baptism, which is necessary for any community if it is to form part of the Church. The omission of receiving baptism is not due to any perceived lack of faith or commitment to Christ, but to reasons of culture. This movement, nevertheless, shows signs of the active presence of the Holy Spirit and demonstrates a strong focus on the Eucharist, which is, after all, the central sacrament of the Church. The movement thus embodies some features of the Church but not its identical or complete ecclesial form.

This movement offers new perspectives to spiritual life in India with social implications, positively contributing to Indian society. It also promises new ways of integrating with the Church in India in addition to, and compatibly with, Catholic practices recognised hitherto, and promises a new way of “being church” in India, which is an addition to the catholicity of faith. However, in their conduct of the sacramental life, the questions related to baptism and the Eucharist, especial-

ly, remain contested and unresolved. Eucharistic communion requires existing ecclesial communion, which is achieved by the reception of the Sacrament of Baptism. However, in the context of Indian culture, baptism is seen not as a spiritual act, but as a civil and cultural act, which brings its recipient within Christian Personal law, and which has wider social and cultural implications.

From an ecclesial perspective, the *Khrist Bhaktas* are not members of the Church but a community who are perceived to practice Christianity without themselves being Christians. From the Hindu cultural perspective, they are a community who practices the Christian faith but who have not left the Hindu cultural fold. They are a community in-between. Questions can also be raised about the kind of Christian faith they practice. Faith in Christ and the Holy Spirit is more evident among them, while faith in God as Father and Creator, which carries implications less congenial to the Hindu worldview, is not so evident. Questions can again be raised about the *Khrist Bhaktas'* view of Hindu culture, as there exists a tendency in some devotees to avoid what they think of as the "Hindu" elements in their enthusiasm to be more faithful to what they think of as "Christian".

Numerous people around the globe are engaging in inculturation in various ways. Many scholars are taking a theological approach, while others are taking a practical approach to inculturation. We have contributed to this field by concentrating our study on community as the primary agent of inculturation. When outsiders or external experts carry out inculturation, they run the risk of being ineffective and irrelevant to the local community, which remains uninvolved. However, when the community itself becomes the agent of inculturation and appropriates the faith into its own culture, the faith seems more meaningful to them. We believe that successful inculturation has to come from below, even to the point of considering inculturation to be a process of acceptance or appropriation by the community and not the introduction of the Christian faith into a culture from the outside. We consider that inculturation is best practiced at a popular micro level, moving from the bottom up, by the ordinary faithful and should allow some flexibility of adaptation. Our study also offers a practical and working model of Christ-centred pluralism in India as an enrichment of the Christian theology of pluralism. This has been the yet-to-be-fulfilled dream of several pioneers of inculturation in India, namely, to make it possible for a Hindu believer in Christ to combine the culture of Hinduism with the spirit of Christianity and so remain within his Hindu community while practicing the Christian faith. Furthermore, our study has shown that the *Khrist Bhakta* movement has opened up Christianity to a wider range of different castes/*varṇas* unifying them into one community in the name of Christ, instead of letting Christianity remain restrictively identified as the religion only of the lower castes. The acceptance of the Christian faith by higher castes/*varṇas* is especially significant when seen against the current anti-Christian climate of opinion and laws prevailing in North India. The new-found

faith in Christ seems to shake the foundations even of the age-old caste barriers, although a decisive blow against it might take generations to prepare.

Our research has questioned the appropriateness of baptism as a sign, applicable to Indian culture, of commitment to Christ. The ideological premises and intellectual framework of Western Christianity are not at all similar to Indian culture or religion. The Western model of conversion and baptism is not compatible with Indian religion and culture. It is difficult for us to rise above our conceptual framework and see what the world might be like from the point of view of someone whose intellectual framework employs different concepts. But that is what is required in this context, as there is a completely different understanding in India of what the individual person, religion, spirituality, and culture, all are, while a Hindu is still able to believe in Christ from within his religion. The method of conversion and baptism traditionally practiced elsewhere cannot, therefore, be applied unchanged to Indian culture. We plead for a re-examination and a re-envisioning of the rite of baptism to particularly emphasise the change of heart, the orientation towards Christ, the social commitment, and the personal relationship with, and discipleship of, Christ that it brings with it.

Up to our present time, in discussions about the theory and practice of “Christ and culture”, the distinction between religion and culture has been taken for granted. We would like to contribute our pennyworth by shifting the emphasis in the context of India towards “Christ and religion”. We have made a call for the acceptance of Christ into the Hindu intellectual and religious framework in the light of the feasibility and need of accepting “Hindu religion” as integral to Hindu culture. In the context of the *Khrish Bhakta* movement, the principle of “incarnation” or “embodiment” calls on us to accept as much of the Indian culture and the Hindu world view as an unavoidable Christian critique of them would allow. What is not assumed or incorporated into Christianity remains unredeemed by it. Nevertheless, given that Indian society needs to be evangelized, and that an Indian church needs to be formed, then faith has to be “fleshed out” in Indian culture. As a starting point, the Church has to be able to accept the Indian framework as its own and thereby make itself an integral part of the Indian worldview. Without first incorporating the Indian conceptual framework, a true Indian church will remain only a pipe dream. The *Khrish Bhakta* movement seems to present us with a model of such incorporation, although it does bring with it, as one might expect, new and difficult questions in the way that every fresh situation gives rise to its own challenges and crises. This model has, however, still given us a road map, a different model for the future of the Christian witness in India, even while at the same time questioning the very sacrament that integrates people into the Church. Our study has brought to light the real ambiguity of the *Khrish Bhaktas* in their call for a new attitude to the reality of Indian religion and culture. The foregoing discussions all call for a fundamental re-thinking of what it means to be the Church in India.

We believe that our research has relevance more broadly for those all over the world engaged or interested in inculturation. The old inculturation model is not false, but we have exposed some of its conceptual and theoretical limitations in the context of Indian culture, which operates on a different conceptual framework. Today, the meeting of West and East offers an increased opportunity to take an interest in that framework. Many people from the West are interested in the spirituality of the East, especially in Hinduism. Our study has shown the difference between how Hindus and Christians view spiritual life against the background of their different theoretical frameworks. We also consider our study as significant for those all over the world who are involved in inculturation, inter-religious, and inter-cultural endeavours. In the communication between people of different cultures or religions, understanding the role played in them by the theoretical frameworks is important for a meaningful meeting of minds.

We assume that further research has to be conducted into the response and attitudes of the Hindus and Christians not involved in inculturation, towards the *Khrist Bhaktas*. We also recommend a study about the type of Christianity practiced by this movement and its implications for other churches. We deem it necessary to research further into the development of the faith of the *Khrist Bhaktas*, their spirituality, their ecclesial and social commitment, not to mention the longevity of people remaining in the movement. There is also a need to develop further our proposal on how and in what way the Hindu framework can become the starting point for inculturation of the Christian faith and what its theological implications are. Further theological input and research is required to guide this movement towards becoming a possible model of an *ecclesia Christi*.

The scope of our study required more effort and time than we had available. It dealt with the obstacle posed to any union between Hinduism and Christianity by the different ideological premises and frameworks on which they operate. The practical reality of thoroughly studying the whole *Khrist Bhakta* movement, which comprises 50,000 to 60,000 people, was beyond our capacity in the short time that we had. We had to develop criteria for interpreting the religious practices of its devotees, and these may not be the best criteria. Our interpretation is just one of several possible ways of interpreting them. The acceptance of a Hindu theoretical framework as a starting point for reinterpreting Christianity is also contested. Perhaps we have idealized some points and overstressed some others or even repeated some others in order to make our point. Our sympathy for the *Khrist Bhaktas* is evident throughout, in spite of our best efforts to remain neutral.

We have stressed the need for embodying the Gospel in Indian culture and purifying the Indian concept of religion and culture so as to deepen its significance. There are still some unresolved differences over baptism and the Eucharist. Although we have been able to point out the crux of the ecclesiological problems and make some suggestions that could help towards solving them, we have not been able to offer any final solutions to them. Our research has, however, opened up the possibility of a fruitful dialogue between Christianity and Hin-

duism taking place in the context of the *Khrist Bhakta* Movement. There are reasons for us to think that this movement should be considered a valid form of Christianity. In the future, if and when a *Khrist Bhakta* living in an overlapping world of Hinduism and Christianity is able to theologize and argue his or her case well enough, things might become clearer.

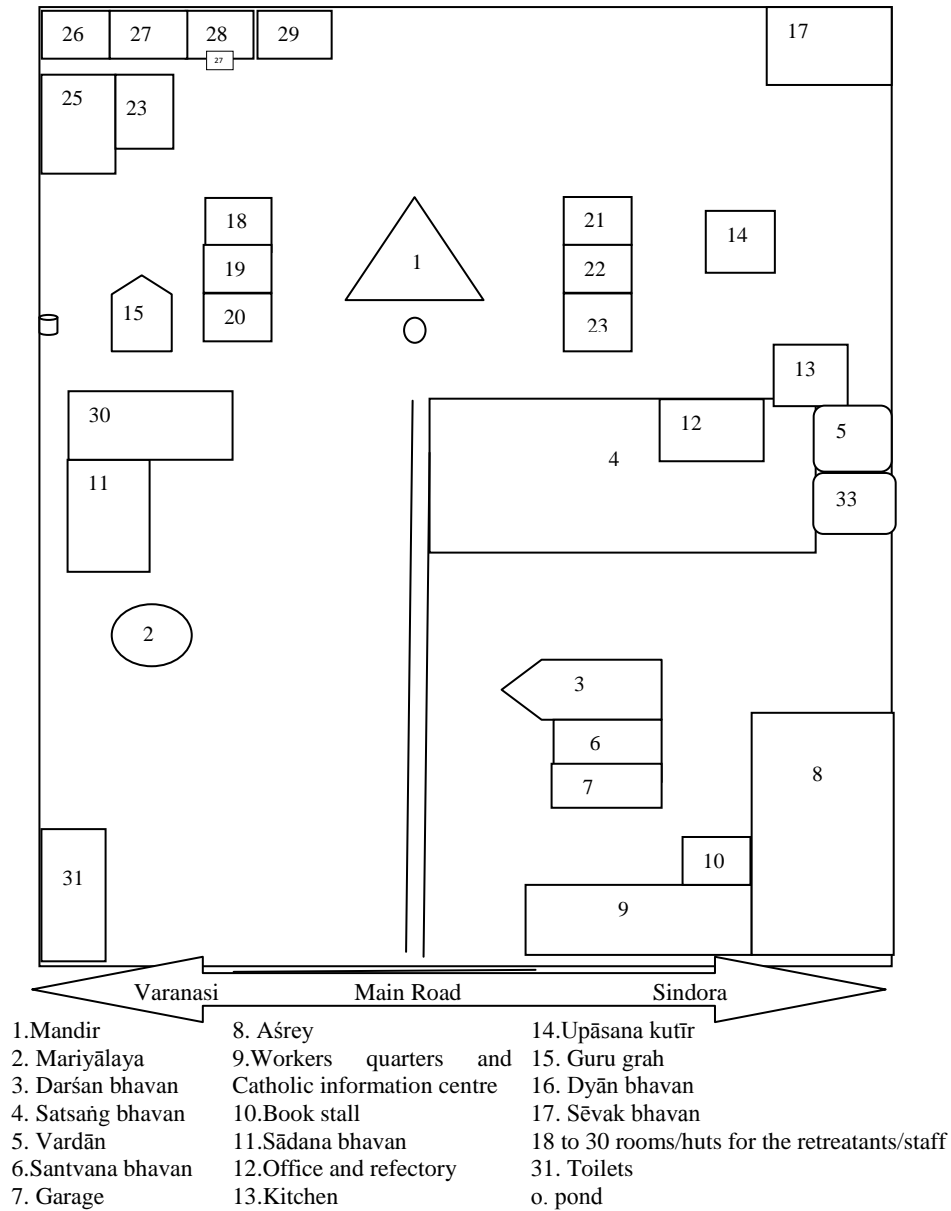
Different points of view make sense, but only if there is a common co-ordinate system on which to plot them; yet the existence of a common system belies the claim of dramatic incomparability.

– Donald Davidson¹²⁶³

¹²⁶³ D. DAVIDSON, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1984, p.184.

APPENDIX 1

An outline map of Matridham *āśram*
(Without consideration to the scale)



Appendix 2



The Sunday *satsaṅg* at Matridham



Anil Dev



Singing *bhajan* at a prayer meeting in the house of late Rajeshwaree (*kallu mā*).



Ārti at the end of a prayer meeting in a village

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In the *Khrist Bhakta* movement, an interesting interaction is taking place between Christianity and Hinduism. It is fascinating as it enables people from Hindu culture to remain faithful believers in Christ without discarding their loyalty to Hindu culture. However, this new assemblage brings with it fresh challenges to both Christianity and Hinduism. The *Khrist Bhaktas* are reluctant to receive baptism despite maintaining a deep desire to receive the Eucharist. The Church is willing to admit them to the Eucharist but only after their reception of baptism.

In this PhD research, the author has inquired the contribution of the *Khrist Bhakta* movement to inculturation in the field of community building in India. He focuses on Matridham *āśram* at Varanasi where rural Hinduism and the charismatic form of Catholic Christianity meet one another. The author addresses the issues involved in this encounter from a social, cultural, legal, pastoral and theological perspective, which is relevant for all those interested in interreligious and intercultural encounter.